

READY NEXT TUESDAY OUR CHRISTMAS DOUBLE No., PRICE 2D.

# THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1856.—VOL. LXXII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 26, 1893.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"BEEN OUT OF SORTS; A BIT OFF COLOUR!" FRANK QUERIED, TENDERLY.

## PARTED BY TREACHERY.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

Of all the pretty girls in and about Hallington, the prettiest certainly was Bina Tracey. She had an oval face, a pink-and-white skin, a pair of regular Irish blue eyes, heavy-lidded and black-lashed, a rose-bud of a mouth, and fair hair that clustered in little soft rings and curls all over her shapely head.

Her figure was tall and lithe, with a slight waist and rounded bust; and altogether she was the acknowledged belle of the place—an honour which she deserved, and which she bore calmly and coolly—with an equanimity, in fact, that annoyed her rivals, the lesser lights in the firmament, considerably.

Not that she meant to annoy them. Far from

it. She was too much *grande dame* for that, though she was but the daughter of a country gentleman—a very wealthy man 'tis true, but one of no particular position.

Still, he had left his widow and only child an income that attracted many suitors to Tracey Place.

They came in shoals, in crowds, like flies round a honey-pot, bustling and fluttering, and striving one with the other to gain a foremost place in either the still comely widow's affections, or those of her blooming daughter.

For the elder lady was a catch, and well-endowed for her lifetime, and the daughter at twenty-one they knew would come into two thousand a year, and another four on the death of her mother.

What wonder, then, was it that needy half-pay officers, briefless barristers, improvident younger sons, dissipated first-borns, rakish noblemen who had run through a goodly sum, and felt inclined to try the process over again, ill-paid city clerks and a heap of others, fought and

prayed and struggled to win these matrimonial prizes, whose golden guineas would so comfortably smooth those little roughnesses of life, which will occur to those whose pockets are sparsely lined with filthy lucre.

What wonder was it that Miss Tracey and her mother never wanted for an escort to meet a garden-party, tennis gathering, or fête—that their programmes were always well filled with the names of the best dancers in and about Hallington! That they were besieged with requests to go to supper, to sing at musical parties, to accept flowers, bon-bons, gloves, all those innocent little trifles that women may accept from their male adorers and friends; that on their "at home" day they had more gentlemen than lady visitors, and that those said visitors lingered long and late, hoping to get an invitation to dinner, a little encouragement, and then an opportunity to put that momentous question so many of them ardently longed to put, and more ardently longed to hear, a soft "Yes," breathed in their ear in response.

What wonder? Why, none at all when one considers the amount of fan that can be got out of the expending of an income of six thousand a year.

However, very few of the needy throng, very few of these great, greedy, rapacious, human flies found favour in the eyes of either lady.

They were both clover women, in a bright, witty style; not blue-stockings, speaking Latin and Greek, familiar with Algebra, Euclid, all the ologies, and well versed in political economy, &c., but charming, chatty, amusing, full of tact, good sense, and kind feeling, and well aware that their money was more an attraction to their adorers than themselves, notwithstanding their beauty and grace.

Perhaps Colonel Ringwood and Peard Lockhart were the two most favoured, and they certainly deserved the favouritism, for the Colonel, had long secretly admired Mrs. Tracey, and as silently as secretly, for he was an honest, upright, soldierly fellow, and knew that his sixty years and his grey hair handicapped him heavily in the matrimonial race, and thought she would not care to mate with him, though he was not quite penniless, having over three hundred a year with his half-pay, and some private property; while, as to Peard, he could not be classed among the flies, as his father was a rich man—his estate, Lockhart Hall, being adjacent to Tracey Place—and he and Bina had grown up from childhood together, he being her senior by six years, five-and-twenty to her nineteen, and her acknowledged adorer since the time when she wore pantalettes and pink sashes, and he knickerbockers and turn-down collars.

The buzzers feared him a little, his recognised place was at her side. Somehow or other they felt, knew that they must give way to him when he appeared in a ballroom, for was it not he who had taught her to valse so gracefully, to wield a tennis-racket with skill, to be the fearless horse-woman she was, the clever par; and in the old days had not his superior learning smoothed away the difficulties of her lessons?

Altogether he was a dangerous rival, one who might succeed with the haughty and beautiful girl, as he could not be accused of mercenary motives; and the impetuous crew hated him with a deadly hate, wished him all the ill-luck they could think of, and would gladly have ordered his coffin, and paid for his funeral with their last shillings, if they could only have got rid of him.

Of all his rivals, the one who hated him most was Major Vane, Stuart Vane. He was distantly related to the Traceys, and had long loved Bina, almost ever since she wore her first long dress, and tied up her fair, rebellious locks. He was a man of evil passions, and had impulses, dissipated, fast, unscrupulous, and had been almost disowned by his family on account of his reputation and many disreputable escapades. Still, despite all that, he earnestly and passionately loved his cousin, without one thought to her money either, for he had left out of the ruin of a princely fortune nearly a thousand a year, and expectations from an old uncle.

Notwithstanding this, however, he was regarded with little favour by his relatives, and those who knew him well, and, in Mr. Tracey's time, had been absolutely forbidden to call at the Place, or hold any communication with its inhabitants.

The keen old man had seen Stuart's evident admiration for Bina, and not wishing by any means to have the doubtful honour of calling him son-in-law, had put an effectual barrier in the way of his gaining his young daughter's affections; so Vane was a stranger to his kinsman's house, never putting foot across the threshold, knowing well what sort of a reception he would receive.

All this was altered after Reginald Tracey's death. His widow was a soft-hearted, yielding woman, and Vane was so very civil at the funeral, to which he was invited for the sake of appearances, made himself so woeful, and uttered such a number of neatly-turned and appropriate speeches, that Mrs. Tracey's heart was won, to a certain extent, and against her better judgment she yielded to his pleadings, finally allowing him to become quite *ami de la*

*maison*, an almost daily visitor, a privilege of which he was not slow to avail himself, and turned to the best advantage.

He haunted Bina's footsteps like a shadow, anticipated her slightest wish, made himself useful to her on every possible occasion, and lost no opportunity of ingratiating himself with his fair cousin.

She received his homage with untroubled coolness, refusing his costly presents with cold politeness, and accepting only an occasional bouquet or spray of flowers as a favour and a condescension—a condescension which was duly appreciated by the donor, who felt in the seventh heaven, and on the straight road to ultimate success when, after several refusals, a spray of *Gloires de Dijon*, or orchids, were accepted and worn by the lovely Bina.

He did not often feel sure of success, though he had nothing to complain of in general about the way in which the fair sex treated him, for he was a general favourite. Still this one woman whom he longed to win, though not coy, was difficult to woo, for, truth to tell, Miss Tracey was far from partial to the gallant Major.

To her there was something particularly bold and repellent about his large black eyes which were wont to fasten on her face with such sedulous pertinacity, and the gaze of which made her feel particularly uncomfortable, though she struggled hard to maintain an outward composure, and never let him guess how much he embarrassed her or how much she felt like a dove fascinated by a snake when she met his piercing glance.

He did not know, and perhaps it was as well so, or he might have made unscrupulous use of the unknown power he exercised over her, so mad was his passion for her.

Her mother saw, knew intuitively, what was going on, yet lacked the power to put a stop to it, to forbid him the house, though she was well aware that Vane would never make her child happy, even did she care for him, which she shrewdly guessed Bina did not, and a loveless marriage she could not even think of in connection with her only one.

And so it was in no very pleasant frame of mind that she paced the drawing-room at the Place one chill February afternoon awaiting Major Vane's visit, for she more than guessed he was coming to ask her aid and permission to propose to her daughter.

She gave a half-impatient sigh as she looked out on the wintry landscape—on the trees rimed with frost, the roads and valleys covered with a thick mantle of spotless snow; on the hedges hung with pendant icicles that glittered with rainbow hues; on the beams of the pale sun that, breaking through the dense clouds, illumined the colourless world for a brief while, and then threw a glance round the warm room, bright with firelight, glowing with soft, rich colours, sweet with the scent of winter violets and hardy blooms, that lent their beauty to add a charm to a place replete with every comfort and luxury money could procure, taste desire, and ingenuity conceive.

Everything was beautiful and costly, the statuettes and bronzes masterpieces, the china rare and old, the tapestries lovely beyond compare, the rugs lavishly strewn over the polished floor—spoils from the far West, the Russian steppes, the Indian jungles; the delicately tinted cobweb glass decorating bracket and shelf, Salvati's choicest work; and yet the mistress of all these treasures wore a troubled look, and a frown wrinkled her delicate brow, her lips were tightly pressed together, and her clear blue eyes were full of perplexity.

The look was still there, and did not escape the Major's notice when he was ushered in by the footman, neither did the seasonable and inviting aspect of the room, with its cosy corners, rich appointments, and glow of light and colour, contrasting so pleasantly with the gloomy whiteness outside.

"You look worried!" he observed, after preliminary greetings were over.

"Do I?" she responded, with some embarrassment.

"Yes, very much so. What is the matter?"

"Nothing of much account," she answered, evasively.

"Some business trouble?"

She nodded her head, not wishing to tell what actually ailed her; and he, never dreaming that the woman who had welcomed him with so much outward cordiality to her home after her husband's death could possibly object to him as a son-in-law leant forward, and, putting his hand on her arm, said confidentially,—

"Now I tell you what it is, Ada, you and Bina want a man, one closely related to you, to see to and settle all your business matters."

"Do—do—you think so?" she murmured, helplessly, feeling that this was the beginning of the end.

"To be sure I do," he returned, decidedly. "Women never understand how to make the best of business matters, how to tackle lawyers, stock-brokers, and those sort of fellows. I warrant all your affairs are in a regular pickle."

"I hardly think they are as bad as that," she objected, meekly.

"Yes, they are," he retorted, peremptorily. "Why you have some thousands out at 1 per cent. Haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is that but a pickle, a terrible blunder, I should like to know! You ought to be getting at least six for it."

"Not safely, Stuart," she ventured.

"Yes, safely."

"Mr. Clements says not. That nothing over four is safe."

"Clements is an old fool, past his work. If your affairs were managed by a clever fellow you would have five or six hundred a year more."

"I think we have enough."

"Can't have too much of a good thing. Good things, like the angels' visits, are rare."

"They are, indeed," with another sigh. "But matters can't be helped."

"Oh yes they can be helped. The fact of the matter is, Ada, you and Bina ought to marry."

"Oh, Stuart!" throwing up hands with a nervous gesture of dread at the thought of what was to follow.

"Have you never thought about it?" he demanded, eyeing her keenly.

"Not—not—for myself," she stammered, blushing like a school-girl, which plainly betrayed that she had done so.

"For your daughter, then?"

"She is—so young."

"Nineteen. Many girls enter the holy estate long before they have reached that age."

"Not many in England; you are thinking of India, where you have passed a large portion of your time."

"No I am not," he declared, obstinately. "I am thinking of England and of Bina, and with your permission I mean to try and win her for my wife. Have I it?"

He regarded her anxiously as he put this question.

"Yes," she responded, slowly, "you have my permission; but, candidly, I must tell you I think you have very little chance of success."

"Why? Is there some one else in the field; that is some favoured swain?"

"I hardly consider that a fair question."

"Well, perhaps not. Notwithstanding this, however, I should like to try my luck."

"Do so, then," she said, quickly. "Here comes Bina, I will go and leave the place clear for you to propose."

"Thanks. But tell me I have your good wishes for success before you go."

"No, Stuart Vane," she replied, with courage born of desperation. "I cannot tell you a lie, I cannot say I wish you success, for I do not think as a husband you would make my dear child happy," and turning, she went out through a door leading into the library, thus avoiding a meeting with Bina, who was coming up the drive, and would otherwise have met her in the hall.



## CHAPTER II.

MAJOR VANE stood gnawing the ends of his moustache, and moodily staring at the little figure coming swiftly towards the house. His ardour was somewhat damped. What if the daughter viewed him as unfavourably as the mother did! Rather awkward, and he was by no means sure that she did not.

He had more than once seen her eyes flash, and her lips curl, when he had ventured on an extra tender speech, or pressed her hand closely. Still "nothing venture, nothing have," and he very much wanted to "have" Bina and her six thousand a-year. So he went forward to meet her with a saucy smile on his moustached lips as she entered the room, and greeted her warmly.

"Where is mother?" she demanded, in rather an imperious fashion. "I thought she was here."

"So she was a short time ago. She went up to her room just before you came in."

"How extraordinary that she should go up now!" and she cast a glance at the dainty tea equipage.

"I see nothing extraordinary in it." "Indeed! Have you been saying anything to ruffle her?"

"If Heaven forbid!" he ejaculated, piously. "We are the best of good friends."

"Ah!"

This interjection was not exactly encouraging to an ardent suitor, and he did not find it so; but he was determined not to be baffled, so he moved towards the fireplace where she was standing, balancing one little foot on the fender, and stretching out her pink palms over the cheery blaze.

"You know we are that, Bina," he said, looking at her with dark, passion-filled eyes.

"Yes," she acknowledged, coldly; "you seem to get on very well together."

"Better than you and I do, fair coz."

"Do you think so?" with elaborate carelessness.

"Yes, I do think so, and I should much like all this altered."

"Would you?"

She favoured him with a steady stare for a full moment out of her great blue eyes.

"I should, I think, considering our relationship, and other things, that we ought to be on much better terms than we are."

"What are the 'other things,' pray?"

"The fact—that—I love you."

"Major Vane!"

She lifted her head, and straightened her slender neck with an indescribably haughty movement.

"Well!" he demanded, coolly.

"Are you out of your mind?"

"Not at present, still I have no doubt that I shall be if you continue to treat me as you have hitherto done."

"I—don't understand you," she rejoined, folly.

"No. Then let me 'enlighten your darkness,'" he exclaimed, hotly; "let me tell you how much you are to me, how ardently I adore you."

"I would much rather you didn't," she interrupted, quietly.

But he did not heed her speech; it did not stem the torrent of passionate words that poured from his lips, and she felt secretly afraid of this man, who stood beside her with burning eyes and trembling hands, declaring that she should become his wife, that any what she might then his great love would sooner or later gain its just reward.

"Never," she said, emphatically. "Never! nothing would ever induce me to become your wife, even would mother permit it, which I am sure she would not."

"We need not ask her consent," he rejoined, sharply, stung thereto by the remembrance of her candid declaration that she did not think he would make her daughter happy.

"I should never marry without it."

"Don't be too sure; you may some day."

"It is most unlikely."

"I don't think so. You might marry even me without her knowledge."

"Ridiculous nonsense. I would never become your wife under any circumstances whatever."

"You—refuse me—then?"

His voice was hoarse and broken.

"I do, most emphatically."

"It is useless; you will be my wife some day."

"Never."

"We shall see. In all my life whatever I have longed for ardently I have become possessed of."

Bina shuddered as he said these words, and she met the glance of his dark, constraining eyes.

What was the power he exercised over her, and what if his words came true, and in the future, much against her will, she became the wife of this man whom she had always disliked and despised!

"You tremble, you turn white, you acknowledge my power," he exclaimed, triumphantly, seizing both her hands in a tight grasp.

"By no means," she returned coldly, recovering herself by a violent effort. "You are impertinent, or you would be if you were in earnest. Of course you jest."

"I am in deadly earnest," he answered, in that measured, masterful tone that filled her with such a chill terror.

"Ridiculous; let my hands go," and with a skilful twist she drew them from his grasp.

"I understand. I know why you refuse me," he scowled.

"Simply because I do not love you."

"Say rather, because you love another."

"Major Vane!"

Again the dainty head was thrown back, with a haughty gesture of affronted pride.

"Yes, I could name the stripling who has won your heart. But mark me, Bina, you shall never be his wife while I live, be certain of that. I would part you from him even at the altar. I have the power to do so, and I will use it without mercy if you defy me, and seek to become his wife."

"You forget yourself."

And without another word she turned and swept out of the room, leaving the baffled suitor staring moodily at the door which had closed on her retreating form.

Bina felt curiously depressed for days after this stormy interview with her cousin. No name had been mentioned, and yet she knew well that Vane meant Peard Lookhart, and she wondered what was the power he possessed, and of which he boasted so confidently, and felt angry to think he had fathomed her secret, for she did love Peard with all the power and intensity of fresh untired youth, and she did not care that the secret should be Vane's as well.

Her droopy looks attracted her mother's notice, and she urged her to don her furs, and drive over with her to Trevor House, where the lake was frozen over; and Mrs. Trevor welcomed any of her friends who chose to come and cut capers on the ice, providing hot coffee, ginger ale, and other warm, cheering, and innocent beverages for them.

Bina acquiesced, and together mother and daughter drove over in their smart victoria, their arrival creating quite a sensation, at all events among the male portion of the skaters.

It was a brilliant and beautiful scene. Steadily and noiselessly all night the snow-flakes had fallen; the earth was white-robed.

Down by the lake the cedar thickets rose one over the other draped in purity, the boughs bent and silvered under their load. Every bush was hung with gem-like icicles, every leaf cased in crystal armour, tree-boles and stones and rails veneered with glass; every blade of grass glistened, every leaf flashed in the sunlight that gleamed over barns, farmhouses, red-peaked roofs and brown-thatched ones, lit them up with a golden radiance, and over all was the deep blue sky, flecked here and there with tiny silver cloudlets.

On the cleanly-swept lake crowds of well-dressed men and gaily-attired girls skimmed along, some hand-in-hand, some alone, some fol-

lowing one another in the Dutch roll, American fashion, some going through the figures of a quadrille, some attempting to waltz, in a somewhat awkward fashion, to the strains of music, played by a military band from the neighbouring garrison town, and all evidently enjoying themselves immensely.

"You are late!"

Young Lookhart had seen Bina, and skating to the bank stood balancing himself cleverly on his skates, and looking up at her, his sunny, grey eyes full of something more than mere pleasure.

"Am I?"

"Of course you are. It is nearly four. Torches will be lighted soon. Shall I put them on?" touching the skates hanging over her arm.

"Thanks!" and dropping into one of the crimson chairs on the bank, she stretched out her tiny boots while he adjusted the acmé—a somewhat difficult task, seeing that he was steel-shod himself.

"There!" as he finished. "Now come along," and giving her his hand, they skinned away side by side, light as a pair of birds, followed by many envious and admiring eyes, for she looked simply lovely in her trim black furs, her delicate cheeks flushed to a brightrose hue, her blue eyes glowing, her lips parted, her whole face and figure instinct with life, youth, and happiness, while he, for manly grace and vigour, surpassed all the other young fellows there.

"A well-matched couple!" said Colonel Ringwood to Mrs. Tracy, as the young people flew off. "Difficult to surpass them in grace and beauty!"

"You are very kind!" murmured the mother, a slight flush suffusing her comely face, which looked as though barely five-and-thirty summers had passed over it, instead of nearly fifty.

"Not at all," responded the Colonel, promptly; "I speak the truth. Your daughter is simply lovely, and Lookhart is a match for her. I can't say anything more for him than that."

"No."

"I am glad you agree with me. And talking of matches, is it to be one?"

"I hope so!"

"And so do I. He is as good a young fellow as ever stepped, and cannot be accused of fortune-hunting," here the soldier sighed, "as he is wealthy."

"No. I should be glad to see her safely married to him!" she rejoined, while she looked crossed her face as she thought of Stuart Vane and his proposal.

"Still, you will feel lonely when she marries!" ventured her companion.

"True; yet I could not consider myself in a matter of this sort," and it was her turn to sigh, and she heaved a deep one.

"Of course not. Still—you may marry again!"

"I—I hardly think so," she stammered; and then raising her eyes and meeting the steady gaze of his she dropped them, blushing furiously; and, somehow or other, the Colonel derived an immense amount of satisfaction from that blush.

Meanwhile the young pair had raced away to a comparatively deserted part of the lake, leaving the gay throng behind.

"Where have you been, and what have you been doing during the last few days?" demanded Peard, pulling up by a dwarf willow, all prickly and sparkling with icicles.

"I have been at Tracy Place, and I have been doing nothing!" she replied, smiling up at him as he stood beside her, still clasping her hands; tall, strong, manly—a lover any woman might be proud of.

"Well, you couldn't do much less, could you?" he laughed, gaily; looking down into the blue depths of the upraised orbs.

"I should have some difficulty in doing it!"

"And why haven't you come here! The ice has been in famous condition!"

"I—I have not felt inclined to."

"Been out of sorts; a bit off colour!" he queried, tenderly, noticing that now they had stopped their mad carousing, she looked paler than usual, decidedly *triste*.

"Yes, I suppose I have been so," she rejoined; avoiding, however, the glance of his eye.

"All the more reason for your rousing up. You certainly ought to have come here, and not moped at home!"

"How do you know I moped!" she demanded, with a pretty assumption of imperiousness—very different from the manner she adopted towards Vane.

"I can see you did."

"How! why!"

"Your eyes are heavy; your cheeks pale; and altogether, you might sit for a portrait of Niobe!"

"Where are the tears?"

"We can imagine those; and a clever artist could, of course, supply any trifling deficiency of that kind!"

"I don't consider you complimentary."

"Well, Bi!" calling her by the pet name he had used towards her in childhood. "Wouldn't you rather have me truthful than complimentary?"

"Certainly I would!" she acknowledged, giving him a fond look that would have satisfied the most exacting lover.

"That's right!" pressing the little hands he held.

"We must do away with the Niobe-like expression and make you resemble Aurora or Venus, or some other smart, smiling, heathen goddess!"

"Peard, you are getting quite romantic and poetical!"

"Getting! Have I not always been so!"

"Perhaps. Now it is becoming more apparent."

"And you laugh at my sentiment!"

"It seems so ridiculous to hear you talking of goddesses!"

"Does it! How unkind to say that. Do you know I hoped that nothing I could possibly do would ever appear ridiculous to you!"

"Did you? Well, you see you made a slight mistake."

"So it seems."

And they both laughed, the clear youthful tones ringing out on the frosty air as they forged slowly ahead, still hand in hand.

"You are coming to our dance next month!" he said, as they retraced their steps, and once more joined the gay throng.

"Of course. Do you think anything would induce me to miss it?"

"I hope not. Think what a blighted being I should be if you did!"

"Would you? I think I shall stay away just to see how you look under the blight."

"Bi, you couldn't be so horribly cruel to a poor fellow, whose only crime is loving you too well."

"No, I don't believe I could," she said, softly, looking at him with radiant blue eyes; and the look was seen by one on the bank, who ground his teeth, and swore a wicked oath under his breath.

And that one was Stuart Vane, who, moodily gazing at the skaters, suddenly caught sight of his cousin and her companion, and noted the interchange of tender glances.

"I'll stop it," he muttered, hoarsely. "I can't stand it any longer. Lockhart is in my power, and now, after all these years I'll crush him as I would a fly—unless—unless she will buy the old man's honour with the price of her hand, and throw over that young jacksnape."

## CHAPTER III.

FEBRUARY merged into March. Nature since autumn had been in a state of hibernation, but now the chill snow had melted, the sun was growing warmer, the fields and hedges were bursting with the promise of May.

In the woods the daffodils that come "before the swallow dares" were showing their yellow bloom.

In favoured spots clumps of primroses peeped from under the greenery. The starlike flower of the stitchwort was out.

The barren clay cuttings were beautified by the dandelion and coltsfoot; the pale pink of the southern almond diffused its delicate colour in shrubbery and garden; while the catkins of alder and birch and willow littered the footpaths, though their leaves had not yet unfolded.

The meadows were a rich green, fair with the first freshness of spring. Away in the trees the birds sang faintly. Ferns here and there sprang up through the grass, blue and yellow butterflies flitted about, and when the sun shone it was like summer.

Delightful weather for a dance at a house like the Lockharts, people said, with the garden, conservatories, and long French windows, and certainly Lockhart Hall looked at its best that warm March night.

It was lighted from garret to basement; all the windows stood open, and the lace draperies swayed to and fro in gentle breeze. Myriads of coloured lamps hung on the trees and shrubs in the grounds around, while a large crystal globe diffused a more subdued light in the conservatory, leaving far corners quite dim, shadowed with huge palms and tropical plants.

The large, oak-panelled hall was cleared for dancing, a military band was on a sort of raised place at one end, while flags and flowers and lace draperies were lavishly used for decorations.

"What do you think of it, Bi?"

Peard asked the question as he stood at her side at the top of the room, which they had to themselves, with the exception of the band, Mrs. Tracey and her daughter having come early, by special invitation.

"I think it simply lovely!" she answered, enthusiastically.

"You like the arrangement of the flowers!" he queried, his eyes bent on her beautiful face just flushed to a bright rose hue, and her brilliant eyes like twin sapphires.

"Yes. That bank of crimson and white roses is most beautiful, and those festoons over the windows! Your designing and arrangement, of course, Peard!"

"Why of course, Bi?"

"Because you always show so much taste over the arrangement of flowers."

"Thanks, dear, for the compliment. Yes, I settled them."

"I thought so."

"I am glad you are pleased."

"I am more than that."

"And now let us confine ourselves strictly to business for a few minutes."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean, possessing himself of the silver boat that did duty for a programme along on her fan, "let me score up before the other fellows get a chance."

"Perhaps the 'other fellows' won't want to score up."

"Oh, won't they! Why, Bina, you are more beautiful to-night than the fairest flower in this room!"

"Now, Peard, don't be ridiculous."

"Now, Bina, don't be cruel."

"I shall have to be cruel, if you go on in this fashion."

"I don't think I can promise not to, my own little wife that is to be," he whispered ardently. "Peard, some one will hear you," she exclaimed, blushing rosy, even her white throat tinged with scarlet.

"Everyone in the place may hear and welcome. Why should I care!"

"Because I do," she murmured.

"Are you ashamed of my love!" he demanded, almost fiercely.

"Ashamed! oh, no! Proud beyond measure," she said, looking at him tenderly, "only—only—I think—as—as—that—we ought—just at present—to—to—to be careful, circumspect," she stammered.

"I see, I understand," he rejoined quickly.

"We are not declared lovers. Well—perhaps you are right. But soon that will be no barrier. I shall see your mother shortly, and then—then, Bina, when I have her consent and yours, we can publish our—"

"Peard," called his father; and without finishing the sentence he had to leave her, and make

himself useful among the guests, who were gathering quickly and thickly.

Bina was besieged by partners, her programme soon full. Amongst other applicants for the honour of dancing with her was Stuart Vane, looking very handsome and distinguished in evening dress, yet nevertheless evil and disipated, with a restless glitter in his dark eyes, and a nervous trembling of his lower lip, which he bit every now and then with a fury that brought blood.

"May I have this valse?" he queried, coolly offering his arm.

"No, you cannot," she retorted in a low voice, full of suppressed anger and annoyance.

"The next then!"

"No."

"Which will you give me?"

"I will not give you any."

"You had better, Bina," in threatening tones.

"I think not," she rejoined, lily.

"I mean to dance with you to-night."

"You make a mistake. You will not do so."

"Before the evening is over you will dance with me of your own free will, and be glad to do so."

"Nonsense! ridiculous nonsense!" and with a gesture of contempt she wrenched her eyes from the constraining gaze of his, and putting her hand on Peard's arm, who had come up, valed off with him.

"You shall pay for this," muttered Vane menacingly, and with a black frown on his brow he went in search of his host, Reternan Lockhart.

Meanwhile Peard led Bina into a dim recess of the conservatory, and drawing a curious old moonstone ring from his finger said, as he placed it on her taper digit,—

"Wear this, Bi, until I place a plain gold one there instead."

"I will," she said, kissing it tenderly.

"It is an heirloom," he went on, "has been in my family two or three hundred years. Every Lockhart gives it to his promised bride as a betrothal pledge, and a night or two before the day on which the marriage is to take place, when everything is settled, and the lady knows that nothing can keep her from becoming Lockhart's wife, she sends it to her bridegroom. Will you do this!"

"Yes," she murmured, "when I return this to you, there will be no shadow between us—nothing to keep us apart for many hours."

"Thanks, dearest!" he said, brushing her cheek with his moustached lips.

For some time they sat there, and then Peard, remembering he had a duty engagement to fulfil, left her, as she preferred resting in that dim, cool retreat to being in the noise and glare of the ballroom.

She shifted her position, going over to the side near the house.

The glass door leading to the library stood a little way open, and through it floated the hum of two voices speaking in subdued tones.

At first the sense of the conversation did not reach her, but suddenly she heard a voice, which she knew was old Lockhart's, say, in agonised tones,—

"My child, my poor boy; can you not spare him, Vane!" and her cousin's return, coldly and sternly,—

"No! justice must be done now, even if tardily."

At once all her energies were concentrated on listening to what was said. She forgot that it was dishonourable to listen to a conversation not meant for her ears; she only thought of the man she loved, and of Stuart's threat.

"It has all been mine so long, now!" moaned the old man; "I cannot bear to think of parting with it."

"It is only yours by fraud—a base inhuman fraud!"

"My poor boy!" he said, again.

"Your brother's poor girl!" answered Vane, ironically.

"She has never known what it is to live luxuriously."

"True. She has had to toil and toil, while



you and your wife and son luxuriated on what is really her money!"

"Are you sure, Vane!—are you sure!" asked Lockhart, in trembling tones.

"Quite sure!" returned the other, decidedly. "Because we all thought Clarence was never married!"

"Then you thought wrong. I have the certificate of his marriage!" and Bina saw him hold up a slip of paper.

"Let me see it!" cried his companion, stretching out his hand to clutch the precious morsel.

"No, rather not!" returned the Major, with a nasty laugh. "I am not such a fool as to allow you to get this into your possession. Read here, while I hold it, if you want to!" and slowly and painfully Lockhart read the certificate which gave undeniable proof that his elder brother had married, for having gone abroad his family had lost sight of him, and for years had had no tidings whatever of the wanderer.

"It is true!" he murmured, brokenly.

"Quite true! You have no right to Lockhart Hall!"

"My poor boy! his brilliant prospects are ruined!"

"You don't seem to think about the poor girl who has lived in poverty while you and yours fastened on her lawful inheritance!"

"She has never wanted for anything!" said Reternan, quickly; "I have always seen to that!"

"No doubt! To make her comfortable, to give her a pittance was just the right way to keep her quiet."

"And you mean to expose me!"

"Villainy ought always to be exposed!" retorted Stuart.

"I did it for my boy's sake!"

"And I do it for the girl's sake!"

"What is she to you?"

"A woman—a weak creature, who ought to be protected."

"Will nothing tempt you to forego this, Vane?"

"No, nothing! Stay! there is one thing," and he whispered to his host, but the old man shook his head, growing visibly paler the while.

"Very well, then!" said the Major, jauntily; "you refuse my terms. Do so, and to-morrow every one shall know of what metal the honoured master of Lockhart Hall is really made!" and turning, he stepped out into the conservatory, leaving his companion with his face buried in his hands.

For a moment Bina stood motionless, stunned, bewildered by what she had heard; then, recovering herself, she stood forward out from the shadow of the giant palm, and laying her hand on his arm, gazed straight into his face.

"Stuart Vane!"

Her voice was hoarse and strained.

"Ah, *ma belle cousine*," he said, lightly. "Why do you condescend to honour me with your notices?"

"I—I—heard what you said—in—in there."

"Eavesdropping, eh! A nice accomplishment for a haughty, high-bred young dame. Who taught you it, your mother or lover?"

"Neither," she answered, curtly. "Do not let us bandy words. You have a paper there that concerns the Lockharts."

"Yes, well!"

"What—what—is it?"

"A cool question! Still you are a woman, and a lovely one, so you can't be denied," he laughed, looking at her admiringly. "This paper," touching his pocket, "will turn Lockhart out of house and home, make him a penniless wanderer, without a crust to eat or a drop to drink, or a shilling to jingle in his pocket, and it makes his hopeful son and heir a beggar. That is interesting to you, no doubt?"

"Will you sell me that paper?" she asked, disregarding the sneer.

"What will you give for it?" he asked.

"All that I am to get when I come of age," she returned, eagerly and anxiously.

"Not a bad offer; still it won't tempt me to part with this precious little document."

"You want more?"

"I want more."

"How much will you take?"

"Nothing in money; I want something else."

"What do you mean?" There was an uneasy ring in her voice.

"Bina," he said, coming closer, and looking down at her with glowing eyes, "I love you—I asked you to marry me once; you refused me with scorn. I ask you again now. Will you?"

"No."

"Not even for this!" holding up the certificate.

"I could not."

"You might do worse. I adore you; you can give Pearl his inheritance, secure it to him. Think, it is not much of a sacrifice for one—you—love."

This last word seemed to stick in the Major's throat.

"I could not. Mother wouldn't permit it."

"As I told you before," he said, grimly, "we need not ask her consent."

"I—I—don't care—for you."

"I know that perfectly well. Still you see I do care for you, and am willing to marry you, though I know of a certain little tenderness you have for another man. Yet I won't let that stand in the way. My affection for you is too great."

"You cannot care for me at all," she retorted, flushing and paling by turn.

"What makes you think that?" he asked.

"Your trying to force me into an unwelcome marriage."

"All is fair in love and war," he laughed.

"This is not fair. You have me at a disadvantage."

"It is the only chance I see of winning you."

"You—you—would—take an unloving wife?" she faltered.

"Yes, I would take you under any conditions."

"Will not anything else tempt you to part with that?" pointing at the certificate.

"All the wealth of Midas would not tempt me in competition with this," touching her hand.

"Have you no pity!" she asked, despairingly. "None where Pearl Lockhart is concerned," he replied, coldly.

"You love him!"

"Yes, I do," she said, lifting her drooping head, and looking full at him. "I love him with my whole heart and soul, and shall to the last day of my life."

"You may do that, but you will never be his wife, never live in his arms, never bear his name. You will be mine—mine. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," she answered, slowly, her eyes fascinated by his, which were fastened on her face in an admiring gaze.

"And you consent?"

There was no answer. Her bosom heaved, her lips parted, but no sound issued from them.

"Think," he continued, "if I make use of my knowledge Pearl will be a beggar, a homeless, homeless wanderer, branded as the son of a man who is a thief, one of the most aggravated kind. You can save him from this. You can make him rich, honoured. Say, will you make or mar his future? Will you be my wife?"

"I will." Her hand closed over the paper he offered her, her cheeks grew deathly pale, and she would have fallen but for his supporting arm.

For a few moments all was dim confusion before her eyes. Her brain seemed to reel, and she did not recover until after the Major had forced some brandy between her clenched teeth. Then he led her triumphantly to the ballroom, and, despite her pleading, made her dance two dances with him. His victory was complete. Before she left Lockhart Hall that night she had solemnly sworn to become his wife within a month.

#### CHAPTER IV.

THE violets were blooming, the young grasses springing green and verdant, the primroses in

full glory when Bina gave her hand to Stuart Vane. It was a private marriage, conducted with the greatest secrecy in a town some fifty miles from Hallington, for she was a ward in Chancery, and the Major by no means wished to jeopardise his precious liberty by having it known that he was marrying a minor without the consent of the Court, and against her mother's wish, for Mrs. Tracey had shown pretty plainly that she would never consent to the marriage.

Thus was his victory shorn of some of its glory, for his pale victim steadily refused to go to the hotel where he had ordered breakfast, and going to the station took the first train back to Hallington. Of course he went with her, and feeling the guard, secured a compartment to themselves.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" he asked, after awhile, glancing at the dainty, averted head.

"Nothing," she answered, without turning towards him.

"You should have."

"Hardly."

"You owe me obedience."

"I owe you nothing, save a life-long misery."

"Bina."

No answer.

"Bina," he repeated, laying his hand on her arm. "Turn and look at me, I command you to!"

At this she turned and looked at him, and the anguish in her eyes smote him keenly, for he was not utterly bad.

"Bina," he whispered, drinking in all the pale beauty of her face. "Can you not love me?"

"No."

The answer was short and sharp, and he winced visibly.

"I am your husband," he urged.

"Not of my own choosing, sorely against my will."

"Still you cannot alter matters now."

"Unhappily not."

"Would you if you could?"

"Not if I could save—him—one moment's pain," she said, with fierce energy, blushing to the tips of her ears.

"Nice kind of thing for a bridegroom to hear," he muttered. "Do you know that I can do as I like with you?" he demanded, throwing his arm round her, and drawing her to him forcibly.

"Let me go," she cried, struggling vainly to free herself.

"Listen," he said, "you are mine. Of what use is all this folly! I take my right," and he stooped his lips to hers, and took a long passionate kiss.

When he lifted his head the look on her face startled him, the girliness had fled, and in its place was an expression of hardened despair.

For the rest of the journey he did not molest her, and let her go to Tracey Place without a word.

He had not married her for her money, still he thought it would be foolish to throw away a fortune like Bina's, and get himself sent to prison as well, so he meant to keep the marriage secret, until she was of age.

The morning after the wedding he sent her a letter and a bouquet. The letter was a request that she would fix an early day for a meeting, and the answer he received was as follows,—

"I defy you. My mother is ignorant of the tie that exists between us, and while she is so I decline to meet you, or hold any communication with, except in her presence."

This nonplussed Vane. He felt she had the advantage of him, and was forced to content himself with meeting her in public at the houses of mutual friends.

He haunted her like a shadow, went everywhere that she went, and was ever at her side. Not that he derived much satisfaction from this. She was coldly polite when any one was near, defiantly hostile when they chanced for a moment to be alone, which was very seldom, as she managed that they should not be.

She never danced with him, nor played tennis, nor rode, nor did anything she could possibly

avoid, and Vane began to find that his Hesperian fruit was only dust and ashes after all.

For Bina matters were terribly painful. Day by day she had to fight off a declaration from Peard, who could not understand the change in her, more especially as she continued to wear his ring, which she could not bring herself to part with, as she remembered, only too well, the terms under which it was to be returned, and also because he often found her soft blue eyes fixed on his face, full of intense love and devotion.

It was a mystery which he wished to fathom, and which he determined to do on the first opportunity.

The opportunity came at an early tennis party given by Mrs. Trevor. Bina, listless and *distracted*, after playing a game or two with uninteresting strangers, wandered away into the pinewood adjoining. There was no wind; a strong, bright sun poured down making it almost as warm as summer. In the trees was a humming sound from the bees, the birds were singing clear and loud; a willow wren called to his mate in amorous notes from the silent fir-top. Sulphur and blue butterflies, with here and there a scarlet admiral or painted lady, tempted out by the glowing sunshine, swept by on gaudy wing, but she hardly noticed them, her heart was too heavy, and she started nervously when a shadow fell across her path, and Peard Lockhart stood before her.

"Bina!"

"Yes," she answered tremulously, not looking at him, and turning as white as her gown.

"Why do you avoid me?"

"A—avoid you," she stammered, helplessly. "Do I avoid you?"

"You know you do. You have done so for the last six weeks. Tell me, have I offended you?"

"No, oh! no," she answered, eagerly.

"Then what is it?"

"Why—it is nothing, Peard. You imagine this—that is all."

"Nonsense, Bina, you know I don't."

"I am sure you do."

"And I am sure I do not. Now—who is right?"

"Why, I am, of course," she rejoined, with a touch of her old light hearted vivacity.

"I am not quite certain of that. Anyway, though, I mean to have matters set quite straight between us, before we part this evening."

"Do you?"

She tried to speak jestingly, but the words almost died away on her pale lips.

"I do."

His tone was full of determination. She felt there was no escape.

"You don't ask why?" he went on after a pause.

"No!" she returned in low tones.

"Perhaps you don't care to know," with considerable pique.

"Yes, yes, I do," she assured him, hastily lifting the blue eyes, and meeting the full, tender gaze of his which discomfited her considerably.

"Well, then, it is because I'm going away shortly."

"Going away!" she echoed; a curious mingled feeling of relief and sorrow overpowering her.

"Yes; I am tired of this pointless, useless existence. More so since you have snubbed me," she winced here and put up a small faintly-gloved hand in protest, "and my father is very anxious, strangely so, to get me out of England (his listener knew only too well why); so I am going to Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and France; and, perhaps, on to the East after."

"Quite a tour!" she said, faintly.

"Quite," he responded.

"And the eastern portion of the globe is not very safe now, with this Egyptian trouble!" she remarked; looking at him with considerable anxiety.

"I shouldn't mind that; quite on the con-

trary. The prospect of a little fighting is pleasant to me. I shall certainly volunteer for special service, and have a shot at those rascally dervishes, if I get half a chance."

"Peard! you will not!" she cried, imploringly.

"Yes, my dearest; I will!" he returned, coolly. "Would you mind if a bullet laid me low?"

"Mind!" she whispered, forgetting everything at the mere thought of such a thing. "Mind! why, I should die too. I should not care to live then."

"That is what I wanted to know!" he said, joyfully; catching both her hands and pressing them tenderly. "You love me!" but instead of a rosy flush her face grew deathly pale, and she tried to withdraw her hands.

"You love me!" he repeated, bending towards her.

"Yes, I love you!" she murmured, indistinctly.

"And I shall come back to claim you as my wife!" he cried, triumphantly.

"No, Peard," she returned, in hoarse and trembling tones.

"No!" he exclaimed, in utter surprise.

"No, I can never marry you."

"But," he expostulated in bewilderment. "You have given me to understand a hundred times that you would. You jest; say you jest!"

"No, I am in very sober earnest."

"I will not believe it."

"You must!"

"You do not mean what you say?"

"I do, indeed."

"You mean that you will not be my wife?"

"Yes."

"You shall tell me why!"

"I cannot."

"Do you care for anyone else? If you do you shall never marry them. Do you know, Bina, that I feel I should kill the man who became your husband?"

She shivered as he spoke, as though a chill wind had blown on her.

"Is there anyone else?" he repeated.

"No. You are more to me than anyone else in the whole world," she cried, passionately; "than anyone ever has been, or will be!"

"And yet—you refuse me!"

"Yes, I refuse you!"

"And you will not tell me why!"

"I—I cannot."

"Bina, are you a flirt? Do you want to break my heart?"

"Oh, no!" in anguished tones. "Believe in me; believe in my devoted love for you!"

"How can I when you treat me like this!"

"It is difficult, I know," she acknowledged. "Only do." And she looked at him with eyes so full of love that he said,—

"You will change your mind when I come back from abroad."

"Don't hope that, Peard."

"But I shall, I must. I shall come to you at once, and plead once more for the boon of your affection."

"No, Peard, you must not," she said, with sad gravity, while the tears gathered thickly on the dusky lashes. "You must never ask me to be your wife again."

"Bina!"

The despair in that one word went straight to her heart. And she went on,—

"Never, unless I send you this," touching the old ring he had given her. "Should the time ever come when I can marry you, I will send you this or place it on your finger, according to the old tradition."

"Must I be content with this promise?"

"Yes. Until you have this ring from me you must not even think of asking me to be your wife."

"So be it," he answered, quietly, kissing the hand he held. "I will never vex you again—only—hope—and hope from day to day that my ring may come back to me."

"Yes, and pray for me," she cried, "pray for strength and courage for me."

"I will," he returned, and asking no more questions, he led her back to the gay throng of

idlers, and stayed by her side some time, talking commonplace, though all the time his heart was wrung with agony, and he was wondering, duly, what this unseen, unknown barrier that had risen up so suddenly between them was.

When he left her his place was at once taken by Major Vane, who had been watching them for some time with jealous, disapproving eyes.

"Peard Lockhart's attention to you are far too pronounced," he declared, in an arbitrary manner.

"Indeed!" she responded, coldly, staring straight before her into space.

"Yes. People are talking about it, saying it will be a match between you some day."

"Really!"

Her disdainful tone stung him.

"You must not allow it."

"Oh!"

"He is far too devoted. I will not have you receive his lover-like attentions in this fashion."

"You cannot help it."

"Yes, I can. You are not to dance with him again, nor stroll away into unfrequented places, nor sit in out-of-the-way corners. Do you hear?"

"Yes; I hear."

"And you will obey me!"

"By no means. I shall do exactly as I please in this and all other matters."

"You dare not," he expostulated, wrathfully.

"Oh, yes, I dare," she rejoined, coolly.

"Your mother would not approve if she knew," he urged.

"You think so!" mockingly.

"I am sure of it. She would think it most improper of a married woman to conduct herself as you do."

"Then tell her," she said, with a strong spice of malice.

"No, I shall not."

"Of course, I know you won't. You are afraid of the consequences."

"What consequences?" he demanded, shortly.

"Being imprisoned for marrying a Chancery ward without the sanction of the Court," she retorted drily, for she had been reading up, and inquiring about the matter, and knew she had him at a disadvantage.

"Pooh! rubbish!"

"You would not think it 'rubbish' if you found yourself in Holloway Gaol, with the prospect of remaining there for a year."

"Ridiculous. I am in no danger of that!"

"Not while I hold my peace. But supposing I choose to publish our marriage!"

"Well!" he asked, defiantly.

"Well, you would find then that you had put yourself within the pale of the law."

"You don't mean to publish it!" he said, some considerable anxiety visible in his tone and manner.

"No, I do not," she acknowledged, "while you keep your distance, and don't attempt to interfere with me."

"You are my wife. You owe me love, devotion, obedience."

"Never, never!" she exclaimed vehemently.

"I will never be more to you than I am now. The mere courtesy I would accord to any stranger will be yours, so long as you do not presume, and keep your distance. Attempt to assert what you term your right, and you lose that; and more, I will do my best to get you punished. Do you understand me now?"

"Yes, I understand," he rejoined, in low tones of suppressed anger and passion.

"Very well, then, I defy you. You are, and must be, as though you were nothing to me," and, rising she swept away from him with an air of an empress.

## CHAPTER V.

So far Bina gained the victory, and her husband kept his distance, though for some months he haunted every place where she was likely to be, and followed her like a shadow, until the gossips wagged their heads, and said it was a case, and that Bina would soon follow her mother's example, and take unto herself a hus-



band—for Mrs. Tracey had yielded to the Colonel's pleadings and become Mrs. Ringwood—and that now it was plain it would not be Peard Lockhart, who had evidently declared off.

But Major Vane, despite his reputation for gallantries, and his faculty for getting rid of any amount of money, Bina smiled when kind friends retailed this gossip, and went on the even tenor of her way, hiding the grief and regret that consumed her with infinite tact, appearing to the world as beautiful, fascinating, and brilliant as ever.

Only those who knew her very well, like her mother and stepfather, saw that a cloud lay on her, dimming the radiance of her beauty, and checking the flow of youthful spirits, and they did not guess the truth, only thought that Peard's absence was the cause of it.

About a year after her marriage a letter was put into her hands. At a glance she saw it was from her husband.

"Finding that you are obdurate," it ran, "and seeing that you hate me, and never will do otherwise, I have determined, as I love you most truly—though you will not believe it—to give you up, to go away, to release you as far as I am able. The secret is safe with me, I shall never claim you as my wife. From this day consider yourself as free as you can be under the circumstances. Could I undo what is done, believe me, I would. I see now I did you a great wrong, but passion blinded me, and I hoped against hope that some day you would grow to love me. I know that that happiness never can, never will, be mine, so I leave you. My regiment is ordered to Egypt. May a bullet soon lay me low, and set you free to give your hand where your heart is already given."

"Your husband,

"STUART VANE."

It was with conflicting emotions she read this letter. She was glad to be free from a man she despised; and yet how utterly was her life ruined—how impossible, how insurmountable a barrier lay between her and Peard! And then she was a married woman, and yet all the days of her life she must be alone, shutting her heart to human love, companionship, and all those joys a happy marriage brings, and must go down to her grave, to all intents and purposes, an old maid, an unloved, uncared-for creature.

It was inexplicably bitter. The earth was beautiful. Why could she not be happy like others? It was hard that her life should be wrecked and ruined through the blind insensate passion of a selfish man, and not only here but Peard's as well, for she knew that after toiling in sunny lands he had gone to the East, and was fighting for England against the swarthy savages of the desert, in deadly danger night and day, and all because of his love for her, his hopeless, rejected love.

"What shall I do, what can I do!" she sighed, pressing her hot forehead against the cool glass of the window. "To live here in this inactivity will kill me, and that not soon, or I could bear it, but by slow and torturing degrees. If I were only poor, if I had to work hard for my living I might not have time to think, now I shall go mad," and she moaned with anguish.

"If I could only be with him," she went on, "only help him, I might do so much. Here in England I am useless;" and then, like a ray of light, it flashed across her that she might go as a nurse to the seat of war, and perhaps help to alleviate the pain of her loved one.

She was a woman of action. Without a moment's hesitation she went to consult her mother.

"Mother," she said, abruptly, "I am going to Egypt as a nurse, to help with the sick and wounded, unless you object to it."

"My dear, is it a fit place for you?" exclaimed Mrs. Ringwood.

"Yes, I shall help the sufferers, and you have often told me that I am a good nurse."

"So you are," she acknowledged, caudally; "still, think of the hardships you must encounter, the horrors you would see on every side."

"I should not mind that if I could do good. Hundreds of girls like myself take up nursing nowadays."

"Of course they do," chimed in the Colonel, who knew that hard work was the best cure for Bina's melancholy. "And what can be nobler than for a woman to give up ease and comfort, and go, like a good Samaritan, to lighten the pain of those who fight, bleed, and die for their country?"

"You are enthusiastic!" said his wife, with a smile.

"I am," he agreed, "in this matter." "I shall be better out there, mother," urged the girl. "I seem just to be rusting here, mouldering away as it were. I want something to stir my energies."

"Of course you do," asserted the Colonel.

"Are you strong enough?" hesitated Mrs. Ringwood, loth to part with her child, and yet, seeing there was something radically wrong with her, that change and active employment might set right.

"Yes, oh, yes! I am very strong."

"You can't go alone!"

"Certainly not, I shall take Allen with me. She is a sturdy, faithful girl, and will go anywhere, do anything for me, I am sure."

"Well, then, if you will go I suppose I must—"

"Consent, dear mother," she interrupted hurriedly.

"Shall I?"

Mrs. Ringwood's eyes sought her husband's.

"Yes," he replied, with an emphatic nod at her. "It is the best thing for Bina."

"Then, my love, I consent; only I don't know how to part with you, or what I shall do without you."

"You must think of the good work I shall be doing, mother; of the poor noble fellows whose wounds I shall bind up, whose sick beds I shall tend, and whose last hours I shall try to soften and soothe."

"Yes, yes, my child, I must think of that, not give way to my own selfish sorrow," and mother and daughter embraced fondly.

A month later Bina stood on the deck of a swift-going steamer bound for the East, with her maid beside her. Her eyes were not fixed on the white, fast-receding cliffs of old England, but gazed steadily at the horizon in front as though she would fain have looked through the immensity of space that divided her from her lover, and have seen what he was doing.

Fast as the vessel went it seemed slow to her impatience, and she would restlessly pace the deck every day, still gazing ahead in her eagerness to catch the first glimpse of the land where he was. She did not lose time on reaching Alexandria, and her credentials—for she had been a probationer at one of the best London hospitals for over a year, and only left, greatly to the grief of the sister of her ward and the nurses, who valued the deft, quick, light-handed, clever girl at her true worth, to please her mother, who could not bear to be separated from her—being first-rate, she was sent on with a batch of other nurses, as near the front as they could with safety go.

At first the scenes and sights around sickened her, but after a while she grew used to them, and could look without flushing on a trooper with his jaw shot away, or an officer with his arm almost sabred in two, or on a poor fellow riddled with bullets, and was ready in an instant to help the surgeons in their efforts to alleviate the sufferer's pain. She was soon noted as one of their best nurses, and valued accordingly; and though she never ceased to search and look for her lost love, she still was busy from morning till night, and sometimes through the night, when there was skirmishing or an attack on the outposts.

(Continued on page 162)

## ONLY AN OLD NOVEL.

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"I SUPPOSE I was crazy, or I shouldn't have thought of the thing!" mused young Doctor Dorr. "Well, few of us but have our fits of harmless lunacy at times. Let it pass. That little three-year-old lad who cried last night at the hospital for the moon had to keep on crying. The moon wasn't to be had. Why am I to get my own way any more than he had his?"

Doctor Dorr had fought his way so far through life, and in the course of his hand-to-hand contest with destiny he had learned to be a philosopher.

"But I loved her!" was his inward cry. "There is no getting aside of that. I loved her!"

And at the same time, little Lois Verney, dusting the picture frames at home, and polishing off the quaint mahogany table, was murmuring to herself the same sweet form of words which will prevail as long as there are love and youth and beauty in the world:

"I love him—I love him!"

While old Major Verney, glaring through his eye-glasses at the little pink envelope on the library table, found a husky voice to say:

"What's this, Mary Ann, eh! My niece writing letters!"

Mary Ann jumped. She stood in mortal fear of the grim major, who was said to have killed three men in the Crimean War, and carried a bullet somewhere in the neighbourhood of his left lung still.

"Please, sir, it's a letter Miss Lois gave me to post," faltered she; "but I ain't cleaned myself up yet, and—"

"Yes, yes!" said the major. "You are a good girl, Mary Ann. Here is sixpence for you. I will attend to the letter."

And Mary Ann responded:

"Yes, please, sir."

Lois dressed herself that night in her best silk gown, with a pink ribbon in her hair, that flung an answering signal to the colour in her cheeks, and sat by the window all the evening. But no one came.

She made a transparent little errand to walk past the hospital the next day. By a strange coincidence it was the day of Doctor Dorr's attendance there—yes, the very hour.

He came out, and Lois' silly little heart began to beat; but he only lifted his hat with polite-like courtesy and passed on.

Lois stood a minute looking after him, as if she were dazed, and then and there the candle of hope went out in her poor little heart.

"If this is love," said Lois to herself, "it's a very disappointing thing—and—and I want no more to do with it. Oh, dear—oh, dear, I wish I were dead!"

Doctor Dorr went on with his work in life. His sister, a hard-featured maiden lady, kept house for him, and there never lacked a button on his shirt, nor the proper seasoning to his soup.

Lois Verney, too, worked on; but she, poor child, was at a disadvantage; for the old major was dead, and Lois had a hard time to keep the proverbial wolf from the door.

"Please, miss," said Mary Ann, one breezy April morning, "I've brought back them painted shells and plaquettes, and things—"

"Plaques, Mary Ann—plaques," mildly corrected Lois.

"And the book-reller, miss, please, he says there ain't no sale for no such, and, please, he wants the window room for something else."

"Very well, Mary Ann," said Lois, with a sigh deep as Avernus.

"And please, miss, the oilman says he has orders not to fill the can until the bill is paid."

"Then we must burn candles, Mary Ann," said Lois, "for we have no money to pay bills."

"But the grocer, miss, please, he says he'd rather we'd patronize some other shop till we've paid something on account."

"Very well," said Lois, listlessly.

She was no Midas. She could not turn blank paper into money by the touch of her fingers.

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"And please, miss, what shall I tell the butcher?" persisted Mary Ann, the ruthless.

"Mary Ann, do go away!" wailed Lois. "How do I know? There's my purse. There is a shilling in it, and that's all I've got in the world. And I don't see any chance of earning anything more. There's some one knocking at the door. Go quick, and see who it is."

Mary Ann clattered downstairs. It was Mrs. Castleton's maid, with a book which her mistress had borrowed of Miss Verney.

"And please, missus 'ud like to borrow 'Peveril of the Peak,' if Miss Verney 'll let her have it."

Major Verney had been something of a book collector in his day, and all the neighbourhood were now profiting by it.

As Mary Ann remarked—

"It did seem as if it took one person's time to run up and down stairs with books for them as borrowed and returned."

"Well, I'll see," said Mary Ann.

And once more she clattered up stairs.

"Here's 'Jane Eyre,' miss," said she. "And Mrs. Castleton wants to borrow 'Peveril of the Peak.'"

"Let her have it," said Lois.

Mary Ann advanced close to her mistress.

"Miss Lois," said she, in a confidential undertone, "if it ain't makin' too bold, why don't we keep a circulating library instead of a free lending place? I heard the bookseller say to-day, while I was wrapping up my packets and things in brown paper, as he made more money out of his circulating library than he did out of his regular business."

Lois brightened up.

"There's some sense in what you say, Mary Ann," said she. "Money must be had in some way, and poor Uncle Verney's books shall earn it for us. I'll cover and number them myself, and you shall give them out and take them in."

Mary Ann was not a bad business agent, and the circulating library business prospered in a small way.

And between whiles, Lois did law copying and mended the already twice darned house-linen. Anything—anything to escape the pitiless demons of thought and memory!

"'Clarissa Harlowe,' eh! That's number fourteen," said Mary Ann to Betsy Roper, a round-cheeked, serving-maid, who had stepped around with her apron over her head and a bright silver shilling tied in the corner of her pocket-handkerchief. "It's the first call we've had for 'Clarissa Harlowe.'"

"I don't know much about 'un," said Betsy, blushing a vivid plum colour; "but my old uncle in Yorruckshire, he always told me to be sure and read 'un when I gotten a chance. He said there were no such books writ these days as 'un. I can keep 'un in the dresser drawer, and read 'un at night when the back o' my work is broken."

Betsy Roper went away chuckling, with the first volume of "Clarissa Harlowe" under her arm, done up in brown paper, and neatly pack-threaded.

But in her desire to cultivate a literary taste, Betsy had calculated without her mistress. "Clarissa had not lain under the napkins in the dresser draw two hours when Miss Minerva Dorr triumphantly possessed herself of it, in the course of a search after a missing japanned tray.

"Ah!" said Miss Minerva, "novels, eh! In my kitchen! Not if I know it!"

And she carried "Clarissa" up to her brother's surgery without loss of time.

"Just see here, David, if you please," said she, quivering all over with righteous indignation. "And that English girl, too, who came so highly recommended, hiding novels away in your kitchen! What is this world coming to?"

Doctor Dorr glanced up from his writing with a smile.

"Why," said he, "I suppose housemaids like to read as well as other people."

"Like!" repeated Miss Minerva—"a silly novel like this!"

"An old English classic, Minerva," gently corrected her brother. "Not that it is my style of reading, but I see no harm in it."

"I shall talk to Betsy when she gets back with the yeast," said Miss Dorr, rigidly. "In

the meantime you will please keep the book here."

Miss Dorr descended once more into the subterranean regions, determined to "see the thing through."

Doctor Dorr took up the book, and slowly turned the leaves over.

"Hello," he said to himself, "here's two leaves pasted together, with something between them."

He separated the sealed leaves deftly with his ivory paper-cutter.

A letter lay there, directed in a delicate woman's handwriting, to "Doctor David Dorr."

He opened it with a strange, giddy feeling in his head.

It was a letter that Lois Verney had written to him five years ago—the letter that said so innocently, so frankly,—

"I love you. I will be your wife."

Major Verney had put the letter there. It required more moral courage than he possessed to destroy it out and out; so he had compromised matters by hiding it between the leaves of "Clarissa Harlowe"—a book which nobody dared to read in this generation. And Major Verney had died and made no sign!

Doctor Dorr rose up hurriedly. He could guess how it all was. His heart leapt joyfully in his breast; all the world seemed *couleur de rose* to him.

He took the letter in his hand, and carried it straightway to the little, old house in Pendragon-street.

Lois was at the window, watering her geraniums. She herself admitted him, with a grave, inquiring face.

"Lois—my little Lois!"

"David!"

The old words came back to their lips as if all the past five years were blotted out. He took her in his arms, and she let her head fall on his shoulder.

"Look, love!" he said, holding up the letter. "I have never seen it until to-day. I found it hidden away with the seal unbroken, between the leaves of your uncle's old 'Clarissa Harlowe!'"

"Oh, David! Then you never knew—"

"That you had accepted me! Not until this hour, Lois. Oh, my darling, my sweetheart! what must you have thought?"

Her head drooped; the bright drops sparkled into her eyes.

"I thought," she whispered, "that life was very hard. But—but I don't think so now. I can understand it all. Uncle Verney never liked you. He wanted me to marry old Walker. But he is dead now. We'll forget it all, David—won't we?"

"For your sake, darling—yes!"

And in the general tidal wave of happiness, no one once thought of Betsy Roper crying her eyes out behind the big kitchen towel in Doctor Dorr's kitchen.

"I never had no chance to read 'un before," said she. "And now 'un's gone. And I don't know what Uncle Ezra, in Yorruckshire, will say when he hears how 'un disappeared!"

But Betsy was not discharged. Doctor Dorr saw to that.

In a work recently published on the different languages spoken throughout the world, an eminent Russian linguist avers that in two hundred years from now there will be only three living languages—Russian, English and Chinese. All other languages and dialects, of which there are at present three thousand, will have fallen into disuse. During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, according to the Russian authority, the whole of continental Europe and of Asia, with the exception of China, will have adopted the Russian language, and Chinese will be the language of the celestials and the Oceanic archipelago.

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## THE LOST STAR.

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### CHAPTER XVIII.

THE Chase seemed a different place to Ruby after Lord Alverley had gone. She could walk in the shrubbery with no fear of finding an unwished-for companion. She could come down to the drawing-room in the evening free from the continual dread of Lord Alverley's secret attentions bringing some unpleasant remark upon herself; but she missed his ready sympathy and keen interest, and life seemed tame, robbed of the perpetual excitement of his presence.

She would not allow it for a moment, and, indeed, told herself constantly what a comfort it was to think that he had gone; but the house seemed dull, and the park dreary, and something made her a little less careful of her appearance, for who would care to notice whether a red camellia or a white, were the more becoming?

Captain Marston stayed on, but the Countess had informed her that he was going to leave on the next Wednesday fortnight; and it was consequently settled that Violet should come and spend the long-promised day on the following Thursday. How Ruby looked forward to this day can well be imagined! A vista of rare delight opened before her eyes, when she thought that when two short weeks were over Violet would be sitting opposite to her in that ruby-leather chair, and she would have nothing to do but listen to her musical voice, and feast on the beauty of her childlike face.

Mrs. Upton had been called away to the sick bed of her mother, but she had not forgotten her former invitation to Miss St. Hellens' sister, and she hoped it would come off towards the end of the month, when that horrid Captain Marston would be safely out of the way.

Unconscious of the ominous shadow which was ever drawing nearer, Ruby went on her way bravely, enjoying every crumb of pleasure which chance threw in her way, and never repining over those which she lost. The frost came back, the lake was once more like a sheet of shining glass, and the party from the Chase amused themselves much on its smooth surface.

Ruby looked regretfully at the small pair of scum skates lying so uselessly in their leathern bag, but it seemed to be taken for granted by everyone that skating was not one of her many accomplishments; so she resigned herself to her fate, and told herself that it would be but little fun without the friends who used to make it so enjoyable.

One Tuesday evening a manly step came down the corridor, and stopped at the door of the schoolroom. Ruby looked up in surprise as it opened slowly, and displayed the tall form of Harold Jerningham standing on the threshold.

"May I come in?" he asked, with a smile.

"I have been sent as an ambassador from my mother. It was only last night that I discovered through that child over there," with a nod at little May, who was bending over a French exercise, "that you were in the habit of skating at the Mount. May I ask if the ice at the Chase is not good enough for you?"

The colour crept into Ruby's cheeks.

"I don't know what it is like, as I never tried."

"Then the friends you were likely to meet were distasteful!"

"How could I come without being asked!"

"How could you walk in the garden unless somebody said, 'Do put on your boots!'"

"That is quite a different thing."

"I don't see it. The lake is open to the whole county, so I don't see why you should need a special invitation; but, if you do, here it is. We are going to skate by torchlight as soon as it is dark, and if you will join us we shall only be too proud. My mother says you may send the children to her; so Miss Bee, mind you are on your best behaviour."

He patted both their curly heads and waited for his answer.

"I should like it very much," said Ruby



heatingly, as she thought of Lady Clementina, and her probable aversion to her society.

"That's all right; we shall look out for you about five o'clock. There will be most likely rather a queer lot down there, but I can promise that you shall be taken care of."

"Oh! there's a dear good Harold, let me go too," implored Beatrice, as she caught hold of his short, shooting coat. "I should like to see the queer people."

"But the queer people mightn't see you, so they would run you down, and cut you up into mince-meat. Don't forget, Miss St. Hellers," and with a cheerful nod he left the room.

A few hours later Ruby stood on the margin of the lake, confused by the flickering light of the torches, as the skaters waved them to and fro.

Every woman had a male in attendance, whether brother, friend, or lover, but Ruby stood patiently with her skates in her hand unnoticed by Captain Marston, who was attending upon Lady Clementina, as well as by the rest of the gentlemen who formed part of the party at the house.

The two Miss Simpsons, conceited-looking girls with fluffy hair and puffy cheeks, started in a staggering manner, with a swain on either side, and were greeted with a roar of laughter; whilst Ruby, determined to be independent, sat down upon the bank and adjusted her own skates without difficulty.

"I meant to have done that for you, but a horrid girl, who wanted to trot me about as a walking-stick, made me too late. Let us begin," and Harold Jerningham, his handsome face flushed with eagerness, held out his hands.

"Thank you; I had rather skate alone," was the unexpected answer.

"But that is impossible in such a crowd as this; besides, I feel as if I were responsible for you to my mother."

"I thought there must be some reason," as she rose reluctantly.

"You needn't have gone very far to find one. How beautifully you do it," gazing down on her lithe figure with involuntary admiration.

"Yes, if I can do nothing else, I can skate. You see I may be trusted alone."

"On the contrary, I see that, however much you dislike my company, I must stick to you to the last."

"Then the last shall come very quickly—that is all."

"You are very flattering. Did I say anything to offend you the other night? If so, I really wish you would tell me."

"I was not offended—only grieved," in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"Let us get out of this crowd."

They put on a spurt and skated at a rapid pace through the ever-increasing throng till they gained a quiet corner at the end of the lake, where the stars shone out in the frosty sky, and the smoke of the torches looked like a luminous fog in the distance.

They drew up under the shadow of an evergreen oak, and still holding her small hands in his—

"What have I done?" he asked, breathlessly.

"You have cruelly misjudged me," and she looked up into his face with fearless eyes.

His expression grew hard and resolute.

"I have only judged you according to what I have seen and heard, being neither blind nor deaf!"

"And what is that?"

"Better known to yourself than others—there is no use in repeating it."

"Then it has come to this; if I accept the friendship which your brother offers me—and remember what friendship is to a girl who has no friends—I am to be considered no longer worthy of your esteem?"

"I did not say that," looking down in some embarrassment at the ice.

"Your actions said it for you."

"I was naturally surprised to find that there was a secret understanding between you and my brother"—again the treacherous flush suffused her cheeks—he saw it, and it instantly prejudiced

him against her—"and I thought it my duty to warn you."

"Then your warning was most unnecessary," drawing up her neck in proud disdain. "I have not lived nineteen years in the world without gaining some knowledge of men and their ways."

"You are nothing but a child, and may well fall into mischief without intending it, therefore I make all excuses."

"You are very kind!" with fine sarcasm. "Believe me, I have nothing but kindness in my heart towards you."

"Hatred, under the same name, would not be very different!" and chafing under his calm rebuke she made a hole in the ice with the point of her skate, and thought of Lord Alverley for the first time, with an indescribable longing. He would never speak harshly to her, whatever she might take it into her head to do.

"You are mistaken," very shortly. "Perhaps you will confess that I was right to warn you, after all, when a man like Marston, who has eyes like a ferret, made a joke of the matter in the smoking-room."

"A joke of what?" she looked up with wide-open eyes of terror. "Oh! tell me it wasn't of me and him!" and she laid her hand imploringly on his arm.

"Don't take it so much to heart," he said, in a hurry, as she turned so ashen white, that he thought she was going to faint. "Men must have something to chaff about, you know, and no one will give a second thought to it."

She was silent, standing there like a stricken deer, her eyes staring blankly before her. It seemed incredible to her that anyone could have noticed a word or look; for Alverley, to do him justice, had been exceedingly careful before people, and no one knew of the scene in the breakfast-room.

What could she say or do? Nothing. The accusation was true in so far as the secrecy was concerned; and how was anyone, beyond their two selves, to guess that friendship, not love, was at the bottom of it? She saw herself for a bitter moment the laughing-stock of the world, and then she rallied her courage and looked up.

"Perhaps we had better move on," she said, quietly, "or they may say that there is a secret understanding between you and me."

"Let them say what they like," he said, hotly, "only, for Heaven's sake, don't turn your back on the only true friend you have in the house."

He had struggled in vain against the fascination she had exercised over him from the first; and now, moved by her agitation, he succumbed at once.

"What! you will be my friend in spite of everything?" she asked, in surprise.

"Yes; if you will have me. Whatever my eyes see, or my ears hear for the future, I will try to believe that you are right."

"Thank you, you are very good; but I feel as if I could never hold up my head again," and she gave a small sigh.

"You mean about Marston?" he said, eagerly; and then added with a sudden change of front, "I would not trouble myself about that, because I shut him up promptly, and I don't think the others understood the allusion."

"Then you frightened me for nothing!"

"Not for nothing," with a smile. "Only to make you more careful for the future!"

"Then, please recollect that what may be only a joke to others may be little short of death to me—alone and unprotected as I am."

"Not alone, I think," as they flew over the ice once more, "with offers of friendship on every side."

"But what are they worth, if they are to be misconstrued?"

"Mine won't be! Appeal to me when you are in a scrape, and I promise to help you out."

As he spoke, his fingers were touching the serpent ring which was to remind her of her promise in a similar case to Alverley.

The two brothers seemed to run a chance of being the two stools between which she would fall to the ground; but casting aside all doubts and fears, she threw herself into the spirit of the

animated scene around her, and determined to enjoy herself once more in her clouded life.

Captain Marston passed, holding a torch high in the air with his right hand, whilst he pioneered Lady Clementina with his left.

The light fell on his sombre beauty, as he bent his face towards his companion in eager conversation. Listening with downcast eyes, Lady Clementina looked so much softer than usual that Ruby wondered what the words could be which brought such an expression to her usually impassive face; and thinking of Violet's escape from his clutches, rejoiced to know that he would go away on the morrow without a suspicion that she was coming to Chester Chase the day after.

"Why don't you carry a torch?" as she noticed for the first time that they were almost the only couple without one.

Harold laughed.

"Because I like to see, without being seen. Darkness gives an independence to our actions which a flaring light would deprive us of."

"That sounds as if we were doing something we were ashamed of."

"Not at all; but I like to skate with whomever I choose, without setting every tongue in the place wagging."

"I think it is time for you to choose another companion," and she stopped amongst a group of loiterers.

"As long as it remains a matter of choice," he said, very low, "that time will never come."

"Never!" with questioning eyes upraised for a moment to his.

The light of many torches fell upon her lovely face, and Harold felt his pulses quicken, as he saw a wistful smile hovering round her lips. Involuntarily his grasp on her small hands tightened as he drew a deep breath, looking down upon her with a strange expression in his eyes. In another moment he would have spoken words that would never have been forgotten, but as they were about to pour from his heart a hand was laid upon his arm, and a familiar voice exclaimed,—

"Run you to earth at last! Miss St. Hellers, let me carry you off, if only for five minutes."

And the next minute Archibald Graves had whisked her away to the other end of the lake, whilst Harold was left to recover himself as best he could. He told himself that he was a fool—a consummate ass—and other complimentary substantives as he lighted a cigar, and stood still to watch for the return of the only couple that seemed to interest him.

As Ruby and Mr. Graves passed Captain Marston, he turned to Lady Clementina, and asked, "What is it that makes Miss St. Hellers look so transported with happiness?"

"How am I to know? perhaps she is in love with Mr. Graves, or perhaps she is proud of her skating!"

"The fox-hunter is not the sort of man she would fancy; there must be something more than that."

"Indeed! you seem to know all about her likes and dislikes. Perhaps you have heard that she has a sister whom she considers a little lower than the angels, and that we are to have the privilege of having her down here the day after to-morrow," and she stopped to button her glove, little guessing at the evil she had wrought by her careless speech.

He started, his heart gave a bound, his eyes gleamed.

"Down here?" he repeated, hoarsely.

"Yes; mamma asked her out of charity, as Miss St. Hellers has been deprived of her expected holidays. Unfortunately, we shall not have the pleasure of seeing her, as I am going to spend the day with the Morningtons, and mamma takes the children over to luncheon at Ripley, so Miss Hellers will have her all to herself."

"And I go to-morrow," he said, as if to himself.

"Yes. What a break-up it will be," she answered, with a sigh; "especially as you take Harold with you."

"Not with me. If the frost breaks up he is going to Melton Mowbray first."

"Well, it will be all the same to us; but per

haps it is as well. I can't help fancying that Miss St. Hellers is a flirt."

"Show me a woman who isn't!"

"Hush! What was that!"

A cry of terror—a sudden rush—a loud-re-sounding crack, which made the ice tremble under their feet, and then a hubbub of excited voices.

"Come on to the bank, the ice isn't safe."

Captain Marston dragged her into safety on *terra firma*, and darted off, calling out,—

"A woman's hurt."

## CHAPTER XIX.

ARCHIE GRAVES, delighted at meeting once more the girl who had fascinated him so much on Christmas Eve, went on his way recklessly, scarcely heeding the crowds which jostled up against him, so utterly engrossed was he in watching the varying expression on a small, pale face by his side.

His spirits were high, and this afternoon he felt like a boy let loose from school.

Ruby caught the infection of his cheerful mood, and her soft laughter answered readily to his nonsensical sallies.

She was friends once more with Harold Jerningham; Violet was coming in a day or two—and she knew that she was an object of admiration to every man she came across; was anything wanting to her felicity!

"Now let us go down the middle with a grand sweep on the outside edge!" cried Archie, eager to show off the infinitesimal grace of his companion before the eyes of that miniature world.

"There are too many people!" objected Ruby. "We are sure to come to grief!"

"Not a bit of it. Take your courage in both hands, as the French say, and start."

Slowly, in long-measured curves, in perfect time with each other, and with a grace that attracted every eye, they came down the centre, men and women stumbling out of their way in a hurry lest they should spoil the performance.

"By Jove! she does it splendidly!" muttered Harold, who was watching with critical attention. "I wonder if she would have done it with me! But it is not wise in a crowd like this!"

Not wise indeed!

A farmer, named Reardon, who had taken more than was good for him, came floundering up the middle of the ice, looking neither to the right nor left.

"Keep off!" shouted Graves; but Reardon, confused by seeing a double set of couples in front of him instead of one, sheered off to the wrong side, and in trying to get out of the way, came down like a battering-ram upon Ruby.

There was a tremendous crash, his feet went up in the air, his head down upon the ice.

Archie staggered, but the farmer caught hold of his coat, and he could neither save Ruby nor himself.

Several others, unable to stop themselves, fell over them in a heap, thrusting their torches into each other's faces, singeing the men's beards or whiskers, and the women's feathers.

Heartily ashamed of himself, Graves struggled manfully to his feet, and strove to extricate Ruby when he had pushed away the others by vigorous thrusts with his elbows; she lay so quiet and white that his heart stood still with fright.

Snatching a torch from the hand of a bystander, he held it over her, and peered with terrified eyes into her deathly face.

A small stream of blood was flowing from her right temple, under the clustering curls.

A woman catching sight of it screamed, and brought a rush of people, which cracked the ice.

"Stand back!" cried Harold Jerningham, in an authoritative voice, "or you will all be in the water."

As he spoke he elbowed his way to the front, and without a word dropped down on one knee by Ruby's side.

"She's dead, and I've killed her!" cried Graves, half beside himself.

"Don't be a fool," said Harold, sternly. "Keep the people back; and take off her skates."

Graves obeyed, looking remorsefully at the tiny feet which had borne their owner so buoyantly but a few minutes before.

"I haven't got the key!" he said, helplessly.

"Beg pardon, sir," said a stranger, with a black moustache and whiskers, "these skates of Miss St. Hellers' fasten with a spring. Press it, and they will come off. See like this!" and he put his rough hand on the shining steel, when it dropped off at once.

Harold looked on in surprise; but was too much taken up with fears for Ruby herself to make any remark when both the skates were off.

He put his strong arms round her, and lifted her like a child.

Her head drooped upon his shoulder, one soft lock of hair touched his neck, and sent a thrill through every nerve in his body.

Bewildered, he shut his eyes for an instant to collect his senses, pressing her to his heart involuntarily at the same time.

The skaters fell back, and made an open pathway to the bank. Captain Marston came up with eager questions, but fell back in awe like the rest of them, afraid of the answer which might come. Harold walked through the midst of them with a stern face.

"Set the lady in a chair, sir," said the same stranger, pressing forward; "and two of us can easily get her up to the house."

"Thank you. I can manage it by myself. Let someone bring her hat and skates."

"I've got 'em, sir, all safe."

"Oh, Harold! what is it! Is she hurt?" and Lady Clementine, darting forward, laid her hand upon his arm.

"Out of the way, dear. Go on in front, and tell my mother."

"Please set me down," said a soft voice close to his ear. "I—I can walk now."

"Are you sure?" Very reluctantly he set his burden down, and drew her hand within his arm.

She passed the other dreamily across her forehead, and drew it back in surprise. "My hair is all wet!"

He took out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped her hand quickly, anxious that she should not discover what it was.

"Where's Mr. Graves?" she asked presently, instinct telling her that he felt himself in disgrace.

"Here!" he answered, in such a dejected voice, that she could scarcely believe it was his.

"I hope we shall have another chance before the frost goes."

"Will you ever trust yourself to me again?" his face brightening.

"To-morrow, if you ask me!"

"Not to-morrow," said Harold, decidedly. "You will have to keep quiet after such a blow as you have had on your head."

"How did I lose my hat! It feels so cold without it."

Harold turned. "Who has got Miss St. Hellers' hat?"

"Here it is, sir," said the stranger, stepping forward; but as Ruby, startled by the voice, looked round, he slipped behind Graves, and she could not see him.

The hat was put on, and they walked on almost in silence, which was broken by Mr. Graves saying abruptly, "Here, you had better give those skates to me!"

"They were given into my charge, sir; so if you will excuse me, I would rather keep them," said the man, civilly.

When they reached the house they were met by the Countess, who was standing at the top of the iron staircase, looking out for their arrival. "And how is she!" she asked in some anxiety; then catching sight of the blood-stained forehead, she exclaimed in horror, "My poor child! You are half-killed!"

"Oh, no!" and Ruby gave a faint smile. "My head aches, that is all."

Then something seemed to give way about her

knees, and she subsided unperceptibly upon the sofa. Everyone thought she was going to faint. Lady Clementine hurried away to find a bottle of salts; Lady Chester called out,—

"Send for Mrs. Nicholson!"

Harold ran for a glass of water; and Graves, anxious to do something, rang the bell. The stranger, meanwhile, who had followed them unperceived, slipped out of the room, and forgetting to deposit the skates on the hall-table, took care to give a good look round before he disappeared through the great doors into the frosty air.

Ruby's forehead was bathed, the gentlemen banished from the room, and the Countess bade her stay there for the rest of the evening.

Mrs. Nicholson saw that she was provided with everything she wanted, and waited on her with motherly tenderness. The children came in on tip-toe and kissed her again and again; then went out directly according to strict orders, little May looking wistfully over her shoulder, as if she would have dearly liked to stay.

Ruby's headache lasted all the next day, so Lady Chester would not allow any lessons to be done, and told her to come down to the breakfast-room, as the sofa there was far more comfortable than the one in the schoolroom.

As she lay there, half-asleep, she could not help thinking of Lord Alvorley and the first night she ever saw him. A blush even now rose to her cheeks as she remembered how he had beguiled her out of a kiss, because she thought he was going to die. She could not tell now, any more than at the time, how much was mere acting, and how little real weakness.

By the afternoon post she received a letter from her aunt, Lady Augusta Craven, who had arrived in London about a week before, to say that she wanted very much to see her on Thursday, and begging her not to change the day if it were possible to avoid it, as she had so many engagements that it would be almost impossible to find another that was free.

Bitterly disappointed at having to put off Violet, she nevertheless thought it her duty to do so, and, with the Countess's permission, sent a line to her aunt to say that she would be with her by half-past eleven, and a telegram to Violet not to come till further notice.

She was handing the telegram to a footman, when Captain Marston, who she thought had left that morning with Harold Jerningham, sauntered into the room on pretence of looking for a book.

Smiling at her look of surprise, he leant against the mantelpiece, and stroked his moustaches with secret amusement.

"You thought you had got me safely out of the way, didn't you? but fortunately Lady Clementine let the cat out of the bag, so I had a letter from my friends this morning to ask me to wait over to-morrow."

"What do you mean?" looking up with supreme indifference.

"I mean that nothing would have tempted me out of the house when I had heard that your sister was coming to it. So you see all your finely-laid plans fall to the ground; and, thank Heaven! I got the news just in time to prevent me from making a fool of myself with Lady Clem."

"You would have proposed to her yesterday if Violet had not been coming to-morrow!" Her headache was becoming maddening under the excitement of her indignation.

"Assuredly I should," with a short laugh; "a man cannot wait for ever."

Her lip curled with cold contempt.

"Then propose to her to-night—Violet is not coming."

"Not coming!" His face fell. He started from his nonchalant attitude, and turned towards her with gravity. "You can't mean it—you couldn't be so cruel?"

"Cruel!" she exclaimed, in scorn. "Who so cruel as yourself, playing with a heart that you have made to love you, as if it were a plaything of wood or stone."

"I never played with your sister; upon my soul I never did."

"But you would have to-morrow," he shook his head—"and you have done so for weeks



with the sister of the man you call your special friend."

"With Clem, it is possible; but then she likes it," he said, carelessly.

"And do you think Violet would care for a love which was to be shared with half-a-dozen others?"

"She should have it all and welcome," his face softening at the thought of her sweetness. "I would have gone to her straightforwardly to-morrow, told that I was not worthy of her, but that I loved her little finger more than any other woman's whole body. Do you think anything would have kept her from me then? You know as well as I do that she would have flown into my arms."

Conscious of his power, he looked at her with triumph in his eyes.

Ruby shivered. The light faded from his face.

"Is it true, upon your word of honour, that she is not coming now?"

"Perfectly true; I have just sent off a telegram to stop her."

"And yet you did not know that I was in the house?"

"No; but I knew that I should be out of it, as I have to go up to town to see my aunt."

"It seems as if the place were to be a desert to-morrow," he said, thoughtfully, as an audacious plan sprang to life in his cunning brain.

"I won't bother you any longer, as you are looking so seedy; but, remember, Ruby, that I shall always have a tender feeling for you because of your likeness to another."

"Then I wish I could destroy it," she said, coldly, as she closed her eyes, and he walked slowly out of the room. Two minutes later he was hurrying across the grass, looking about him from side to side as if in search of somebody who was likely to be going in the same direction.

For some time it seemed as if he had all the park all to himself, but on getting to the boundary he saw the figure of a boy in front, climbing over a stile. Without any difficulty he overtook him in the high road, for the boy, who was accustomed to carry messages between the Chase and the station, and in the habit of running like a lampfighter, now hobbled like an old man, bound hard and fast with the rheumatism.

"Hallo, Tom! Got the gout?" cried Captain Marston, in a cheery voice.

"Chilblains, sir; and terrible bad they be."

"Humph! I not the pleasantest things to walk with. Have you far to go?"

"No further than the station, but that's a mile too far," with a grunt of pain.

"If you were only taking a letter or a small parcel I might save you the trouble, as I'm going there myself, but I suppose you have some other business."

"Nowt a bit! 'cept this paper, sir," said the boy eagerly, drawing the telegram from his pocket.

Captain Marston took it from his hand. "And this is to be sent off, I suppose, at once?"

"Them be my orders, sir. There can be no harm in your taking it," as his conscience pricked him.

"No, you little fool. Don't you think I may be trusted as well as you?"

The boy touched his hat, grinned an assent, and hobbled off; longing to throw his boots in the ditch as he went, but restrained by a fear of his mother. When he was out of sight, Captain Marston pulled the paper out of its cover, and scanned the long-coveted address with eager eyes. "28, Chatterton-street! Good Heavens! What a hole for such an angel to be in. Well, if the worst comes to the worst, I know where to find her!"

Whilst Ruby was lying asleep on the sofa, unconscious of the clouds that were gathering over her head, a telegram was sent in her name to her sister, bidding her come by the early train on the morrow, and promising that she should be met on the road. When she woke an uneasy feeling possessed her that she had let out too much to Captain Marston; but on thinking it over she could recollect nothing which she would

have wished unsaid, so her peace of mind was undisturbed.

## CHAPTER XX.

It was a damp cheerless morning, when Ruby came down in her bonnet and jacket with her fur cloak over her arm.

"Let me put it on for you," said Captain Marston, who had come into the hall on purpose to see her off. "You will want everything you can get to keep the cold out to-day."

She thanked him with a pleasant smile, as she allowed him to wrap it round her shoulders, for she could not help feeling some compassion for the bitter disappointment he had suffered that day.

"When you come back I shall be gone," he said, buttoning the apron of the pony carriage over her knees. "Wish me some consolation for your absence."

"Not necessary. You would have done better to secure your consolation yesterday evening."

"Perhaps, I did, who knows?"

And with a mischievous smile he waved his hand, as the coachman flicked the ponies with his whip, and they started forward at a rapid trot.

Half-an-hour later, having seen Lady Clementine off in one carriage, the Countess with her two youngest children in another, Captain Marston, with an air of innocence that would have betrayed him to anyone who knew his character, lighted a cigar, and sauntered down the road towards the station.

It was not a pleasant morning for a stroll, and he was not the sort of man to bear any inconvenience without grumbling; but, supported by the thought of Violet, he kept his temper pretty well for the first five minutes, and only began to curse the unpunctuality of insignificant rustic lines when he found that the train was later even than usual, and nearly a quarter of an hour behind time.

At last a puff of white smoke further down the valley showed that it was coming on its way, and his battered heart began to beat with unaccountable speed as he knew that the dark-looking iron serpent was bearing his beloved to his arms.

Afraid of being seen by prying eyes, he got over the stile and waited the other side, scanning the few passers-by—a woman with a basket of eggs, a drover with a bag of wheat, and a lame youth—with eager expectant eyes. "She must have missed the train!" But, no! here she comes. That graceful pose of the small head, the easy grace of the walk, could belong to no one but her or her sister.

She came up to the stile, and looked doubtfully along the road, evidently surprised at not seeing any sign of Ruby, whilst he watched her, his eyes devouring her innocent face, his arms twitching with the desire to catch her to his breast.

How pretty she looked, the darling! with that serious look in the lovely eyes, which used to soften so wondrously when they met his own!

She hesitated, put one foot upon the lower bar of the stile, another on the upper; and then, before she had an idea of his presence, a man, whom she had not time to recognise in his pot-hat and ulster, sprang out of the bushes and caught her in his arms.

She gave a cry, but the cry was stifled by a scented moustache; and a voice that she had heard of late only in her dreams, murmured ecstatically, "At last, my darling, at last!"

Then, knowing who it was, she trembled from head to foot, and a great joy possessed her, mingled with fear. The trees and palms seemed to whirl round in a dance; and, scarcely conscious of her own actions, she hid her face on his coat.

Captain Marston looked down on the drooping head with an expression of irresistible longing in his passionate eyes.

"Raise your face, dearest, I want to see it!" but she only turned it away more shyly, whispering,

"Does Ruby know?"

"Did not you get her telegram?"—a little nod. "Then how can you doubt! I told her that nothing could keep me from you, and she had to give in. Let me look at you, darling; I want to see if you are changed." Then he raised her face gently. Scorching blushes were on her cheeks, and tears in her shining eyes.

A feeling of compunction crept over him—hardened man of the world as he was—and even in that hour of triumph the thoughts passed through his mind, "Better for her if I had left her alone!" but it quickly vanished beneath the power of her beauty. And as she tried to free herself from his embrace, he stooped his head suddenly, and kissed her quivering lips with eager passion, as the thirsty man snatches at a goblet of wine.

She drew back shyly, but left her little hand still clasped in his as a token of affection. Slowly they wended their way through the wood, meeting no one as they went. She was so bewildered by the sudden apparition of her lost lover, that she had room for no one else in her thoughts; and he was careful to absorb her whole attention, not wishing to tell her of her sister's absence till it was too late to go back, except by the same train as he meant to take himself.

After the dull and tedious life in Chatterton-street, it seemed to her, as she walked by her lover's side, amidst surroundings that were utterly strange to her, as if she were in a dream. Soon—too soon—she must wake and find herself once more in the dismal lodging, with a piece of work in her hand, and nothing on earth but the street-cries to enliven the monotony of existence.

Every circumstance of life seemed to place her completely in Captain Marston's power. She was dull, he promised her excitement; she was lonely, and he offered himself as her companion; she was poor to the last degree of poverty, and he swore that if she would only trust herself to him she would want for nothing. In Chatterton-street, with homely Mrs. Chapel for her only friend, she pined after a sister's affection as a love-bird deprived of its mate; but if she yielded to Marston's wishes he promised her such constant, abiding love as woman had never known before.

Her heart was soft as a piece of clay in the sculptor's hand, and the man who walked by her side knew that he could do with it as he liked.

His own heart seemed to be singing a song of triumph as he gauged his power over her pliable disposition, and found that it knew no limits. He worked on her tenderness till scruples were forgotten in a sort of delicious delirium; and conscience was completely deadened by the voice of the charmer in her ears. She had no chance against him, as Ruby had foreseen when she took such precautions to prevent a meeting between the two. He was a demi-god in her romantic eyes—a man so far above the average man of the day that she wondered that every one did not admire his wonderful superiority.

"Your father was prejudiced against me," he said, gravely, as he stroked the hand which he still held in his own. "If he had lived, I could easily have convinced him of his injustice. You never doubted me, Violet!"

"Never," she said, enthusiastically. "I knew that you were good, and noble, and true, and I always said so!"

"And Ruby contradicted you. Some day she shall own her mistake."

"I hope she will; but when she has got an idea into her head it is difficult to knock it out."

And she sighed.

"Hush! you must not sigh with me," and he drew her gently to him, as they stood together in the summer-house, where Alverley had sat a few days before, trying hard to flirt with Ruby. "She will be very sorry to have missed you; but, you see, she could not help it, and I am rather glad to have you to myself."

"But isn't she here?" And her eyes opened wide with dismay.

"Didn't I tell you? I suppose I forgot. She had a letter from your aunt, begging her to come and see her to-day, so she was obliged to go off, much against her will."



"I KNEW YOU WERE GOOD, AND NOBLE, AND TRUE, AND I ALWAYS SAID SO!" REPLIED VIOLET.

"Then I ought to go back at once," very ruefully; "I would not face Lady Chester and her daughter for anything."

"Lady Chester and her daughter are away from home. But don't look so distressed; we will go up together by the two o'clock train—"

"But is there none before?"

"Not one. Are you tired of me already?"

"Tired!" with a little gasp, more eloquent than a thousand protestations.

"I thought you must be. It is horribly cold for you here," as large flakes of snow came slowly through the branches. "Ah! that is the bell for the servant's dinner—they will all be out of the way—we can get into the school-room as easily as possible, and there you shall warm yourself as much as you like."

"But if anyone should see me?"

"They would take you for your sister, so that would not matter. Of course you could go into the dining-room and lunch with the Earl, and whosoever else happens to turn up, as you have come down by invitation; but I think it would be infinitely cooler for you and me to lunch together somewhere in town, don't you?"

"Infinitely!"

Captain Marston led her to the breakfast-room by the iron staircase, and then up the back-stairs to the schoolroom, where, like two children engaged in a game of "hide-and-seek," they sat behind the fire, whilst all the rest of the household were unconscious of their presence.

The mystery about their proceedings gave them a double charm in Violet's eyes, and ignorant of the fatal precipice which lurks behind the fairest flowers she gathered them with eager hands, careless of whither and to what they were luring her.

The man who sat at her feet knew the danger to a hair's breadth, but he was the last man in the world likely to tell her, for her risk was his joy, and he was counting the minutes till it would be run.

"I suppose I shall see Ruby when I go back," said, musingly, as she looked at the rows of

lesson-books in the shelves, and imagined her sitting at the table, in that high-backed chair, looking over French exercises.

"Not if you are wise. If I were you, I don't think I should care to meet her after what you have been doing to-day."

The colour rose in her cheeks.

"But how could I help it?"

"Did I want you to help it?" carelessly.

"She is so very straight-laced and prudish that she would have grudged me every kiss I have stolen since you have been here."

Violet hung her head.

"I ought to have gone back at once."

"How could you without a train? And do you think I should have let you, if you could? Are you sorry that you stayed?" with keen reproach.

She looked at him from under her dark lashes, and he stopped to kiss her hand.

"Listen to me, and I will tell you of my plan. My things have already gone up to town by the train that I am supposed to have caught, so I need not bother about them. When we reach Alverley, you shall get into one carriage and I into another. At the next station I shall join you, and when we get to town, and have satisfied the pangs of hunger, I will take you to the afternoon performance at the Lyceum, and bring you back to Chatterton-street, when your sister has already started for Paddington."

"But I should like to see her."

"Then you cannot love me," he said, sternly.

"I tell you that one word to her would spoil everything. Which will you have, me or your sister?"

The tears rushed into her eyes, her cheeks grew deadly white. "Can't I have both?" with a piteous gasp.

He shook his head.

"You must choose between us. Violet, can you hesitate?"

The next moment her bright brown hair was resting on his shoulder, and the sacrifice of her will was complete. Overpowered by the force

of his passion, she consented to everything, even to that mockery of a marriage at a registry-office in London under false names, which was to bind her conscience and leave him free.

When he gained all he wished for, he looked at his watch and said they must start at once if they meant to catch the two o'clock train, Violet hurried into her gloves, and adjusted her hat with his help.

"Now," he said, after considering a moment. "I shall go down the back-stairs, but you had better find your way down the front. Turn to the left when you leave this room, and walk along the passage into the gallery. You can't make a mistake."

"Can't we go together?" she said, timidly.

"More prudent to be separate. If you meet anyone, you know, you will be taken for your sister, so it won't matter. I will go first, and wait for you in the shrubbery."

He opened the door cautiously, and walked softly down the passage. Violet waited a minute till the sound of his footsteps had vanished, and then came out upon Anne, who was looking in to replenish the fire. The girl started back in sullen surprise, for she had been told that Miss St. Hellers was spending the day in London. The meeting so confused Violet that she turned to the right instead of to the left, and found herself at the open door of a luxurious bedroom, which art and money had combined to make into a perfect bower of repose.

After one hurried glance of admiration she retraced her steps, passing the schoolroom-maid again as she did so; and, feeling like a burglar on a nefarious errand, stole down the broad staircase across the vast hall, and out by the front door, which, by a lucky chance, was open.

She felt as if she could not breathe freely till the shrubbery was reached, and Captain Marston met her with outstretched hands,—

"My darling, I thought you were never coming."

(To be continued.)





PLACING HIS STRONG ARMS AROUND THE FRAGILE FORM, HE BORE HER SAFELY TO THE BANK.

## BINGLEY WOOD.

—201—

## CHAPTER I.

It was a miserable night. Harried relentlessly by fierce wind masses of cloud rushed madly through the sky. Occasionally the wind seemed to forsake its diversions, dying away with sighs and sobs. Then with renewed vigour it returned to the charge, shrieking with delight to see noble trees bow in humble obeisance, and every leaf and twig do homage to its authority.

The moon, whenever an opportune rift in the clouds occurred, smiled pityingly on a wretched, rain-soaked world.

A train, having disgorged two passengers, issued from the small station of Bingley, leaving two forlorn travellers contemplating with rueful countenances the retreating carriages.

One of these passengers was a well-built gentleman of six-and-twenty, muffled in a waterproof warranted impervious to the attack of the elements. Tall, with breadth of chest denoting great strength, and with a handsome, sunny face, which could notwithstanding on occasion look wondrously stern, he represented a fine type of England's sons.

The other passenger was a fine Newfoundland dog.

"Any luggage, sir?" inquired an obsequious porter, having an eye to a prospective tip.

"Yes. Is there a carriage from the Hall?"

"Haven't seen none, sir."

"I must walk, I suppose. I will send for my portmanteau in the morning. Good night. Bruce! come on, old fellow."

"Beg pardon, sir, but did you say the Hall, sir? The water is over the road below the dam, sir. Should say a short cut through the wood would save you some bit, if you bea't—"

"Thank you; I am not afraid. Good night."

Leaving the porter to ruminate upon the perils of the road and upon not unwelcome beneficence, for the stranger had tipped him liberally, Ernest

Haseldine stepped into driving rain and pursued his lonely journey.

A dark, dreary road, with only a solitary house here and there, rain falling with aggravating persistence—a cold and lonely walk—might well have induced a traveller to spend the night at the village inn.

To tell the truth, the insinuation of the official at the station had somewhat piqued our determined pedestrian.

"Afraid, indeed!" he muttered; "we've been through greater trouble than tramping a lonely road—eh, Bruce!"

Raising his bright, intelligent eyes the dog wagged his tail in token of assent.

"Why don't you speak, old man!—you'd be much more sociable!"

Opening his mouth and giving vent to a half bark the noble brute seemingly did his best to obey his master's behest.

Talking to the dog and advancing with rapid strides Ernest quickly arrived at a spot where the footpath led from the road across a meadow and thence into the wood.

As he entered crowds of recollections, incidents of boyhood's escapades, crossed his mind.

"Twelve years," he continued, still addressing his canine companion, "twelve years since Dick and I played our larks in this old wood. Poor Dick! Afghan bullets were too much for him. He was a brave lad—too brave, I fear, for—Hullo! What's that!—sounded like a cry!"

Stopping short and holding the dog by the ear he listened.

The wind with fierce gusts swept amongst the trees, and its diurnal moan made a shudder run through his frame.

"I certainly thought I heard something; it might have been—"

"Help! help!"

The cry came through the air, borne by the wind with startling distinctiveness.

Ernest Haseldine's heart stood still for one instant; then, grasping his stout stick, he dashed forward. A few strides brought him to an open

space, and there a sight met his gaze which made his blood boil.

With his back to a tree stood a man with silvered hair. In front of him were two villainous-looking footpads, armed with short, heavy cudgels. Creeping up behind came a third, carrying a similar weapon.

His arm was raised and the moon for an instant revealed the fearful notches of the weapon as he raised it above the head of the brave old man, when with a short, fierce growl Bruce's teeth suddenly closed on his throat, bearing him to the earth. At the same time Ernest felled one of the other ruffians with his stick, and the third, seeing matters were desperate, with an oath beat a rapid retreat.

Stepping forward and clasping Ernest by the hand the old man, his voice husky with emotion, said:

"Young man, you have saved my life! How can I thank you?"

"By saying no more about it. Here, Bruce! come to heel!"—for the dog was showing an inclination to worry the villain under him.

"It is only what any other man in my position would have done. Help me to secure these rogues."

The two men began to show signs of returning animation.

"Is there any place where we can lodge them for the night?" asked Haseldine.

"Yes, my gamekeeper's cottage," returned the other.

So bidding Bruce take charge of the man he had held down, now restored to consciousness, telling the man to walk beside the dog as he valued his life, and taking the other rogue between them, the captors marched their prisoners to the house of the gamekeeper, who received them with intense satisfaction, stating they were two of the most desperate characters in the village.

Bidding the keeper watch his prisoners carefully the elder gentleman turned to his companion.

"I trust, sir, you will not think me ungrateful

for the inestimable service you have rendered me to-night, because of my inability to thank you in sufficiently warm terms. The debt I have incurred is one which cannot be cancelled by a mere effusion of words, nor would I have it so, but if there be any service Richard Travers can render to his preserver, I trust you will mention it."

"Sir Richard Travers," replied Ernest, "If you consider the slight service I have rendered you worthy of any reward the favour I ask is that you will recall me to mind. My name is Hasseldine."

"Ernest Hasseldine—Dick's chum! The young urohin who was the ruin of my plum-trees! Why lad, this is indeed a pleasure!"

And truly affected the two men grasped each other by the hand in a silent grip more eloquent than words.

## CHAPTER II.

"ERNEST, lad, I'm glad to see you."

The hearty, genuine tones of the speaker, the loving light in the eyes, the beaming smile which irradiated the round, jovial face, of Squire Malfern amply corroborated the assertion.

It was the morning following the affray.

Nature, strangely versatile, had substituted for storm, wind, and rain, light, genial sunshine. The morning breeze, richly laden with the scent of flowers, came in delicious gusts through the open windows of the breakfast-room at the Hall.

Standing by the window, and greeting each other with warm affection were the squire and his nephew.

"But come, my boy, you must be hungry, and I have urgent business to transact, so we will breakfast."

With assiduity characteristic of the rics to which they belonged, and with appetites sharpened by the fresh morning wind, they attacked the plentiful repast with which the table was laden.

"Did you say business would call you away this morning?" inquired Ernest.

"Yes. I must go to Barham to see my solicitor about that piece of land through which old Travers claims the right of way."

"The ancient dispute, sir?" queried Ernest, with an amused twinkle in his eye.

"The same, Ernest," answered the squire, a grave look spreading over his open, jovial face. "But you must not think, lad, that this is the real cause of our antagonism (have some of this tongue). A trumphy roadway through a remote corner of my estates would not cause the enmity of a lifetime. Yet I will lose every penny of my money before I yield an inch of ground to Sir Richard Travers."

"Why this enmity then, sir?"

"Lad, it is a tale of many years ago. When I was a young fellow about your age, Richard and I were to each other as brothers. We both of us, however, fell in love and unfortunately with the same girl. I was the favoured suitor and I married her. One year of intense happiness was ours; then she died. Sir Richard and I quarrelled, and since then we have been worse than strangers—enemies."

Strangely grave looked the squire as he finished, and somewhat uncomfortable, too; conscious that Ernest was earnestly contemplating him.

"But I see Jim has brought the mare up to the door. I am sorry to leave you, lad. You must spend the day as best you can. There are some excellent trout to be caught in the Hollow."

Rising hastily and mounting his mare, Squire Malfern left to take counsel with his solicitor on the much-vexed question of "right of way."

Left to his own resources, and recollecting that the trout stream his uncle had recommended was a favourite resort of his boyhood, Ernest wended his way thither. Treading the velvety turf which covered the banks of the stream, he whipped the water till he reached a spot where the trout abounded, but where it became almost impossible to throw the fly.

It was a delightful nook, shady and retired.

The trees lying the banks of the miniature river spread their branches protectively over it, effectually screening it from the rays of the sun.

Through an opening of the trees could be seen the demesne of Sir Richard Travers. Far away as the eye could reach lay the broad acres of the baronet—acres report said sadly encumbered, owing to the reckless extravagance of his ancestors.

The Towers, a somewhat rambling building of Gothic architecture, its clustered columns overgrown with ivy, was built upon a commanding eminence.

A magnificent park, studded with fine old trees, stretched with gentle incline from the front of the mansion. The variety of the foliage—the gentle undulations of the green sward—formed a view of striking beauty, enhanced and completed by a lake, the still water of which gleamed in the sunlight.

A tiny barge, drifting at the pleasure and current of the breeze, floated on its peaceful bosom.

In the stern of this little craft, reclining in luxurious ease, was a fair girl.

Just ripening into womanhood, her dark brown hair escaping in bewitching waves from the bondage of the prim knot behind the head, strayed over the low, white forehead in delightful confusion. A sweet, pure face, with a complexion browned somewhat by the sun, yet rivaling the peach in delicacy of bloom, and a form of perfect symmetry formed a picture of entrancing loveliness.

The eyelids, fringed with long, black lashes, hid the beautiful orbs it was their duty to protect.

Clad in the hazy folds of some soft, white material, and sleeping in graceful repose, she looked the impersonation of Tennyson's Elaine. She was indeed:

"Lovely, for she did not seem as dead.  
But fast asleep, and lay, as though she smiled."

The little stream which relieved the lake of superfluous water was swollen by the rains of the previous night into an angry torrent. Drawn by the influence of the current the boat slowly entered its channel, the sound of the leaping, dashing water passing as soothing melody over the unconscious occupant.

Gracefully rounding a curve, and yielding to the clamorous entreaties of the waves, the advance of the craft became more rapid.

Faster and faster sped the boat. Right on in front were two boulders of rock rising out of the middle of the stream and about a yard apart. Between them the water rushed with fearful rapidity. Hurried onward with headlong speed, the prow of the boat was driven like a wedge between the rocks.

The shock, and a shout from Ernest Hasseldine, roused the sleeping girl, who awoke to the fact that she was fixed in the middle of a rushing stream—a circumstance which caused her considerably more embarrassment in that a gentleman was regarding her with a look in which mirth and gravity struggled for the mastery.

"Can I be of any assistance to you?" he courteously inquired.

"I fear not," was the dubious response.

Bewitchingly pretty she looked standing in the boat and striving with sweet confusion to coax her hair into its proper position. The attitude showed to full advantage the rounded and graceful development of her charming figure. Ernest thought as he regarded her with such evident admiration that the grave eyes drooped and the blush on her fair cheek deepened.

Without hesitation, and before she had time to remonstrate, he stepped into the stream, the water rising above the waist.

"I think I can extricate the boat," he said, wading towards it; fair occupant.

Exerting all his strength he struggled, as well as the awkwardness of the position and the rush of the water would permit, to free the boat from its confinement, but so firmly was it wedged between the rocks that all his efforts were in vain.

"I fear there is no alternative. I must carry you to the bank."

Honestly perplexed he looked in the water, and she read the gentlemanly consideration in his eyes as he asked:

"Can you trust me?"

A little hesitation and then he heard a shy: "I must."

Placing his strong arms around the fragile form, and lifting her with perfect ease, he bore her safely to the bank, wondering who his precious charge could be.

"It was very foolish of me to fall asleep. I fear I have effectually stopped your fishing."

"I have had more success than I could have anticipated," replied Ernest.

Packing up his rod he prepared to accompany her.

She saw the intent and a deep blush bathed her face and neck, real distress and alarm supplanted the confidence with which she had treated him.

Ernest did not perceive it, and commenced to walk by her side in the direction from which the boat came.

In his anxiety not to embarrass her he was not looking at the face by his side, or perhaps he would have wondered at its painful agitation.

With every step this agitation increased until at length, as they came to a spot where the path diverged from the stream, she stopped. With distress written in every feature, the sweet blue eyes looking commiseratingly on his dripping figure, and glancing from it, as with apprehension, up the path, she offered him her hand, and spoke in a sweet, low voice, broken and agitated from some strange cause, a few words of hurried thanks.

"May I ask who is thanking me?" queried the unfortunate Ernest, detaining the little white palm she had offered.

A roguish gleam for an instant flitted into the upturned eyes, a provoking smile playing round the mouth as she answered:

"No, you may not."

"Will you come to see about the welfare of your boat to-morrow?"

"Perhaps."

The little hand was not released. Another apprehensive look up the path and then she said: "Yes, I will come."

With hasty steps she departed; and as Ernest stood looking after her with a strange, warm glow at his heart, he saw a tall, masculine form meet her, offer an arm, and escort her in the direction she was going.

A shadow crossed the handsome, sunny face, so bright but five minutes since, as he watched the greeting, and turning on his heel he strode in the direction of the Hall with conflicting feelings in his heart.

## CHAPTER III.

THE declining sun, shedding rays of golden splendour over hill and dale, threw a red gleam into the dark, musty, library of The Towers.

In his "sanctum sanctorum" sat the baronet.

A sunbeam playing about his features, contrasting with strange incongruity with the weariness and dejection which rested on them, revealed the deep furrows stern time, with that most effective of all his chisels—pain, had carved there.

"I confess, Daisell, I do not like the business. Although Mand has consented to my wishes and suggestions in a manner which must to you be specially satisfactory, and one which shows her appreciation of her duty to me, yet undue paternal influence is—"

"An unsatisfactory means to a satisfactory end. I have intimated already, Travers, that your daughter's engagement can be effectually cancelled by repaying the few thousands you owe me. You, however, want my money. I want your daughter. Useless recrimination will scarcely avail you, unless you have the means of settling my little account."

As he finished, the speaker emerged from the recess of the window in which he had been standing.

Tall and bony, the angularity of his frame, unrelieved by a tight-fitting clerical coat, showed in mark distinctness against the light which beamed in at the window.

There was a gleam of triumph in his eyes as he heard the troubled sigh of the baronet.



"But come, let us join the ladies."

The baronet rose and silently followed his companion as he quitted the apartment. Crossing a spacious hall Dalzell, with a manner almost suggestive of proprietorship, entered the drawing-room.

An air of comfort, ease, and luxury reigned here and throughout the home of Sir Richard Travers.

Richly furnished, almost lavishly magnificent in the splendour of its appointments, everything was yet arranged with a delicate refinement which produced a harmonious effect.

The Reverend Bagot Dalzell, the incumbent of Bingley, was a man of considerable private wealth, and the recipient of £800 per annum for ministering to the spiritual necessities of the people of his parsonage.

Rumours had gone abroad that although he had, till the age of thirty-five, avoided matrimonial snares, he had at last succumbed to the attractions of Lady Maud Travers, only daughter of Sir Richard.

He was dark, with heavy features; his lips wore an habitual smile of cynicism, his arrogant, self-important bearing marked a somewhat commanding appearance; whilst the look of cunning in his eyes, whose colour it was difficult to determine, filled one with mistrust and repugnance.

Friendly with few, an enemy to be avoided, he was much sought after and petted by the surrounding gentry of Bingley.

He had advanced large sums of money to Sir Richard, whose lands were already heavily burdened by mortgages, and the impetuosity of the baronet enabled him, when he proposed for the hand of Lady Maud, to secure the father's influence and authority as a means to win her consent.

A sweet voice, singing to a harp accompaniment, greeted his ear as he entered. The baronet heard it also as he lingered on the threshold, listening with an expression of infinite love on his face. Only for an instant. The careworn face, with its brief smile of tenderness, was suddenly contracted by a spasm of pain, and with a stifled groan he turned abruptly on his heel and sought the quietude of the balcony which ran along the front of the house.

As he paced to and fro with uneasy strides, looking over the so-called acres of the Travers family, he noticed a horseman riding at a leisurely trot up the broad avenue of lime trees.

There was nothing unusual in such an appearance, for The Towers was full of visitors, yet the action of the horse and the perfect seat of the rider attracted the critical gaze of the baronet.

"By George! It is the nag which that old rascal, Malvern, out-bid me for at Hensley sale, and if I mistake not it is Hazeldine on his back."

There was a cordial greeting as Ernest Hazeldine reined in his spirited steed. All glow with exercise, his close-fitting riding suit showing to advantage the strength and symmetry of his figure, his eyes lighted up with the excitement of the ride, he looked a remarkably handsome man.

A groom led the horse to the stables and then the baronet piloted the way into the house.

Maud was still singing as Ernest was presented to Lady Travers.

"You are welcome at The Towers, Mr. Hazeldine. As the friend of my brave boy I am more than pleased to see you."

There were a tremulousness of voice and a quivering of the lips as the kind face looked with motherly regard on the "friend of her brave boy." For the only son of Lady Travers, a Lieutenant in the army serving in Afghanistan, had been reported "missing" in the list of the killed and wounded after an engagement, and now, after a lapse of six months, no tidings having been heard of him, the sorrowful conviction had forced itself upon her that the brave lad had died nobly fighting for his country and his Queen.

"Mr. Bagot Dalzell—Mr. Hazeldine."

A supercilious elevating of the eyebrows on

the part of the elder gentleman. A very stiff bow from Ernest.

The music had suddenly ceased, the musician evidently becoming aware of the proximity of a stranger.

"Maud, my child! come to me. This is Mr. Hazeldine; Dick's friend. My daughter—Mr. Hazeldine."

The sweet face bowed longer than conventionally demanded—was flushed with confusion—nor was the girl's embarrassment lessened by the tender, half-laughing face of Ernest as he recognised the "Elsie" of the morning's adventure.

The guests fortunately had passed through the open casements to the lawn, followed by Sir Richard and his wife, leaving Maud with Ernest to bring up the rear.

"I fear Mr. Hazeldine, you thought me very ungrateful—"

"Very, Miss Travers. I was unprepared for the startling, though agreeable revelation. 'Elsie' should have confessed who she was this morning; yet I trust she has sustained no harm from her extraordinary escapade, and that she is not very alarmed at my advent."

"Nay, do not laugh at me, Mr. Hazeldine. You startled me very much, and I must have my revenge. I challenge you to oppose me at 'tennis.'"

"I accept the challenge, with pleasure."

It was a delightful evening. Nothing was needed to enhance the pleasure of those who participated in the game, whilst to those who were old enough to prefer a seat in the shade the graceful movements of the figures, the intermingling of bright costumes and the merry laugh at the non-success of some energetic effort to reach a ball, formed a *tout ensemble* of happy, innocent enjoyment.

Yet amongst the people who stood apart was the Rev. Bagot Dalzell, watching the game with no amiable expression of feature. Although he saw that Maud and Ernest were enemies, the spirited contest between them seemingly afforded him little satisfaction. With lowering brows he watched the game to its close, and the frown deepened as he heard:

"Mr. Hazeldine, I have beaten you."

"It is a very pleasurable experience, Miss Travers."

Maud caught the sardonic expression of Dalzell's face as he heard the *repartee*, and the merry, joyous features suddenly paled, and from the lips the bright smile died away.

"You are feeling chilly. May I fetch you a shawl?" inquired Ernest, noticing the sudden gravity.

"Thank you, no. We will return to the house."

It was rapidly growing dark, and the players separated to dress for dinner, to reassemble however at the hospitable board of the baronet. The fare was choice, the wines were perfect, yet unusual quietude prevailed. Conversation flagged. There was an entire lack of witicism and happy badinage—a cloud seemed to rest upon the company.

The voice of the Rev. Bagot Dalzell, with a self-opinionated ring about it, was plainly audible, producing a depressing influence on those around.

Specially obnoxious did he make himself to Ernest, apparently with malice prepense. Egotistical and arrogant to a degree, Dalzell's superciliousness occasionally made the hot blood rise to Ernest's face when some special assumption of superiority bordered on insolence.

Dinner at last over the ladies retired to the drawing-room, whilst the gentlemen were lingering over their wine.

Ernest joined Sir Richard on the balcony.

"Do you smoke, Hazeldine? I have some choice Havannahs here."

"Thanks. What a lovely night it is, and—listen!"

Through the open windows above them came the soft, ravishing notes of a violin, accompanied by a harp, playing the opening bars of some delicious production of the old masters.

The two men stood in silence whilst the night air was flooded with sweetest harmony.

The silence was broken by the baronet.

"We shall be sorry to lose her."

"To lose her, Sir Richard!" was the astonished ejaculation.

"Yes. Have you not heard of her engagement?"

A moment or two of silence, in which the character of the music overhead changed.

A wall of passionate feeling rising with strange agitation higher and higher. Then a hoarse voice said,—

"I have not. Who is the fortunate individual?"

"Bagot Dalzell. She marries in two months' time."

The storm of music was over. Subiding with sobs and sighs it came through the evening air with a wonderful pathos and died with sweet pathetic notes, as though expressing sympathy for a brave heart on the balcony and a white, drawn face full of pain.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"BRUCE! Come here! Take up your position exactly in front of me, and listen to what I have to say."

It was the morning following the tennis party.

Seated on the bank of the trout stream was Ernest Hazeldine, addressing his dog with mock gravity.

The dog, obedient to the command, had placed himself in the desired position, and was regarding his master with praiseworthy attention.

"This, sir, is the scene of the disaster."

The dog's mouth suddenly opened and a bright red tongue protruded, whilst his tail maintained a steady oscillation.

"The lady would not tell me her name, but she promised to look after the welfare of her boat to-day."

Whether the dog appreciated his master's meaning cannot be determined, but one ear was suddenly uplifted, imparting to his face such a peculiarly questioning look the risible faculties of the speaker were upset.

"Why did I come here! Also to look after the boat of course."

Implicitly confident that the explanation was a right one, the dog resumed his look of intelligence and attention.

"But you need not anticipate her coming. I have met her since, and I think it improbable she will trouble about the fate of the craft which treated her so ungallantly, or think of a promise made to me under compulsion."

The speaker, looking through the opening in the trees as he spoke, gazed long and earnestly at the clustering columns of The Towers.

The dog, judging from the fit of abstraction that the interview was concluded, marched away.

At the same time a maiden, wandering among the labyrinthine flower-beds at The Towers was meditating.

"He will not be by the brook to-day, as he was here last night. Why did he leave so suddenly, I wonder! Papa, too, looked very grave when he came in. Yet I must go, I suppose, he made me promise."

Maud finished her soliloquy with a merry laugh as she recalled the adventure of the previous day, and entered the house, to reappear shortly after, attired for a walk.

As she wandered her way with light, graceful steps by the brooklet toward the scene of the mishap a cold nose was suddenly pushed into the bare white hand by her side and a huge black head caused her to scream involuntarily.

She was reassured by honest, loving eyes and demonstrations of delight, as Bruce walked by her side, occasionally lifting his head for a caress, which she did not hesitate to give, wondering who his master could be.

There was no need to wonder long, for as they rounded the corner of the path they met him, towing the boat up the stream.

It was a very simple good morning, and yet there were tell-tale blushes on the girl's cheek,

and Ernest was conscious that his heart beat quickly. There could be no mistaking the light in his eyes as he held the little hand within his own for one brief instant.

Wandering down the green, mossy pathway they forgot the boat, the object of their mission. Diverted by the witty sallies of her friend, the fear which had distressed Maud the previous day was dispelled, as in happy abandonment she walked by Ernest's side.

The broad-brimmed straw hat, taken from her head and swung to and fro in her hand, was filled with the field flowers they had stayed occasionally to gather.

He had just culled some forget-me-nots from a difficult nook where she could not reach them, and had laughingly demanded a bouquet for his services.

Standing on tip-toe to reach the button-hole in which she petitioned to have them put, with merry badinage she tried to meet the eyes looking earnestly into her face; but she was not prepared for the depth of tenderness she found in them, and she feared to recognise the strange agitation and glow in her own heart, or to interpret the trembling of her fingers as they strove to fasten the flowers.

A harsh, dissonant voice broke the spell; something resembling distant thunder was heard through the trees.

"Get out, you brute!"

More thunder. Evidently Bruce was stopping the progress of some intruder.

"It is Mr. Da'sell. Good bye."

Ernest had hardly divined her intention when she disappeared behind the trees, wild flowers marking her way of retreat.

Ominous sounds were proceeding from the path ahead, when a commanding "Come here, sir," from Ernest brought Bruce to his feet.

At the same time appeared the Rev. Bagot Dalsell in a towering rage.

"I will have that dog shot! I demand that you muzzle him at once. He is dangerous."

And indeed he looked dangerous. Although crouching at Ernest's feet, two pearly rows of fangs were disclosed, and low, fierce growls expressed how willingly he would bury them in Da'sell's throat.

A severe blow from the stick the clergyman carried had completely closed his left eye, but the remaining orb gleamed with fierce rage upon his assailant.

"I shall suggest, sir, that you make a rapid retreat," said Ernest, in suppressed anger, "or you may repent hitting him."

For once in his life Dalsell had met his match. He quailed before the three eyes regarding him with honest anger, and another deep, suggestive growl from Bruce settled the matter.

With a look of malignant hatred he hastened down the pathway strewn with wild flowers.

"Good Bruce, go and take care of her."

The dog dashed past the retreating clergyman and took up his position beside a fragile girl, who wondered at the disfigured face and why the Rev. Bagot Dalsell did not overtake her as she hurried homeward.

It was eventide.

The bells of the little church of Bingley were summoning the villagers to worship.

Toll-worn men and women, lads and lasses in the bloom and beauty of youth, old men whose silvered hair and tottering steps indicated they were not far from the great transition to another world, were hurrying to evensong.

Weeks had passed by, and Ernest, on this the last day of his stay, entered Dalsell's church.

He had hoped to declare by his presence that he bore no malice, but Dalsell was away, a neighbouring minister officiated in his stead.

Alone in the large oak pew of the Travers family sat Maud, whom Ernest had steadily avoided since the contretemps by the brookside.

The pure, spirituelle face, pale and unlike the Maud of two months ago, was bowed in devotion. All the gladness which once irradiated the features had departed, leaving a sadness and dejection which to him were unaccountable.

Only once were her eyes lifted during the service, and they were suffused with tears.

He was kneeling almost opposite her, and as her eyes, attracted by the subtle fascination of his gaze, met his, every nerve thrilled in his frame; his heart seemed bursting with its great love.

Perhaps it had not been kind to avoid her thus. He thought there was reproach in her sweet eyes.

A great yearning to comfort her in her trouble entered into his soul; but she had given her heart to another, to whom alone belonged the right to shield and protect her, and he was hardly a friend.

It was a simple service. The quietude of the evening was typical of eternal rest and peace, as, with the benediction of the aged minister resting upon them the congregation slowly dispersed.

Ernest overtook Maud at the little gate at the end of the pathway, and with grave politeness raised his hat.

"Have you no escort, Miss Travers? Will you allow me to accompany you?"

The sweet face was not lifted as she replied.

"I am alone, but do not let me trouble you, Mr. Haseldine. I assure you I am not afraid."

"I need no assurance of your courage, Miss Travers, yet, if you do not forbid me the pleasure I will inflict my company upon you."

"Thank you."

He held the wicket open for her to pass through. Side by side they walked along the shaded footpath leading to The Towers.

The moon had risen just over the hills, and her silvery beams fell athwart the beaten track.

It was a dangerous night for these two hearts, each trying to keep its own secret. A painful silence had come upon them, which each feared to break.

The lights of The Towers were getting very near. At the last stile, ere he helped her to climb to the top bar, he gently detained her, holding her hands.

The features he loved so well could not be hidden now, yet her eyes were averted from the handsome face earnestly regarding her.

"Have I offended you, Miss Travers?"

No reply.

"I return to town to-morrow. You will grant me forgiveness before I go?"

It was cruel to keep her standing there. Ominous signs proceeded from the quivering lips of approaching tears, while the white face was turned to him in mute appeal.

Still he did not let her go.

"You have not answered me."

"I have nothing to forgive."

"You will let me congratulate you, and wish you much joy in the future, Miss Travers?"

There was only a choking sob.

How his heart bled for her! Prudence was almost forgotten—honour almost overcome by his great love.

"Maud, will you not tell me your trouble?"

"I cannot. This is very foolish of me. Let me go. Good-bye."

There was a wild bitterness in his heart as he raised the proffered hand to his lips. With straining eyes he watched the retreating figure till it was lost in the darkness; then, with a heavy heart, he found his way back to the Hall.

## CHAPTER V.

"HUSH! Oh! Mary—breathe light. Have you taken the key from the door?"

"Yes, miss."

"Open the casement gently, then. What was that?"

"Only the creaking of the hinge, miss. Ugh! how dark!"

"All the better for my purpose. You are sure John will be waiting by the lodge gates?"

"He promised me faithfully to be there, Miss Maud, and he never broke his word to me yet. Are you not afraid to venture down the avenue alone?"

"I would brave a thousand deaths, Mary, to escape to-night. Be faithful to me and God will reward your fidelity. Lock the door from the inside and retire to rest. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, dear Miss Maud."

A figure, closely muffled, emerged from one of the ground casements of The Towers, and with swift, noiseless steps wended its way under the lime trees. Only once did it stay to gaze long and earnestly, as though taking a last loving farewell of the indistinct mass just perceptible in the darkness. Then the girl resumed her hurried walk with something like a sob.

Reaching the end of the avenue she unlocked the gate of the lesser lodge and passed through into the high road.

"Is it you, miss?" inquired a deep voice by her side.

"Yes, my good John. Where is the carriage?"

"Hard by, miss."

As she ensconced herself in the close carriage to which he directed her, John mounted the driving-seat.

"Drive quickly. We have not much time."

On the still air of the night preceding the marriage of Miss Maud Travers with the Rev. Bagot Dalsell was suddenly heard the roll of wheels, as a close carriage, driven at a rapid rate, hurried along the country road.

Onward it went, with unchecked speed, until it neared the red and green lights of some small railway station, when a hand was protruded and a sweet voice exclaimed:

"You had better stop here, John. It will be imprudent to drive too near."

Having drawn up the carriage by the side of the road he helped her to alight, and Maud, drawing the awning closer round her head, hurried towards the platform of the station.

Only just in time, for the night express came thundering in almost immediately. Amid the bustle and scurry which usually attended its arrival a tall, military-looking stranger descended and began to look for his luggage.

"By y'r leave, sir."

The stranger took one pace to his rear to avoid the hand-truck a porter was trundling along the platform, and placed his heel on the dirty foot of a lady immediately behind him, almost crushing it.

No exclamation of pain proceeded from her, but the white, set lips of the partially concealed face denoted the agony she was suffering.

"A thousand apologies for my clumsiness," exclaimed the gentleman, turning suddenly round. Then seeing the frail, muffled figure anathematised himself as a "blundering ass." "I fear I have hurt you."

"Do not apologise. It is nothing," was the response, in a low voice.

In direct contradiction to her assertion she limped towards the train.

"Let me assist you."

Very patiently, and with gentlemanly consideration, the stranger conducted her to a first-class carriage.

Something in his voice and manner strangely agitated the lady, whom he felt was peering hard at him, but she was very timid, and the lights from the station lamps was not sufficient to reveal his features.

"Stand clear there, sir! All right!"

As with banging of doors and a scream the train left the platform the military gentleman, his curiosity aroused, walked to the ticket-box.

"Clerk, a lady passenger closely wrapped travelled by this train."

"Yes, sir."

"Where did she book for?"

"Did you notice what 'class' she travelled, sir?"

"First."

"One first-class, single fare, Ashley."

"Thank you."

Into the dark night he went, stepping at a brisk rate along the high road leading to Bingley. It was a long walk, yet the pedestrian in a little over two hours reached the lodge gates of The Towers.

"I must ring the fellow up, I suppose. Hullo! What the deuce does this mean! This game-keeper is a careless fellow!"

One of the lesser gates yielded to his touch. Noiselessly closing it he hurried along the avenue, as though familiar with the ground.



"Old Stiggins used to sleep in the west wing of the house; I wonder if that is his dormitory now! However, here goes!"

The effect of a shower of gravel against the window-panes overhead was instantaneous. A head, adorned with marvellous headgear, was at once protruded and a voice exclaimed:

"Who's there?"

"Richard Travers," replied a deep voice. "Come down at once, Stiggins, and come quietly."

The head abruptly disappeared, and the owner, ill-satisfied at being roused at such an unseemly hour, lighting a lamp, trudged downstairs.

Softly unfastening the bolts the front door swung easily open on its hinges. Instead, however, of the silvered hair and portly figure of the baronet a young fellow strode into the hall.

"Mur—"

In an instant a hand was clapped over the butler's mouth, while a low voice exclaimed:

"Don't be an idiot, Stiggins! Do you not know me?"

There was something too tangible about the hand over the butler's mouth, or he would have believed he saw a ghost. As it was, so startled was he that the lamp dropped from his hand, leaving them in utter darkness.

"Good Heavens, Mr. Richard! is it you, sir?"

"Hush! you will rouse the house. Refasten that door and come to the library."

With shaking hands the old servant proceeded to refasten the bolts. Then, picking up the lamp with trembling eagerness, he hastened to the library.

"How are my mother and father, Stiggins?"

"Not what they used to be, sir, afore they concluded as how you was dead."

"Dead! What do you mean! Have they not heard from me?"

"Not a word, sir; and Miss Maud marries to-morrow, sir—leastways to-day."

"Maud! Whom?"

"Parson Dalsell, sir, more's the pity, axing your pardon, sir."

"Bagot Dalsell! Stiggins, where can I sleep?"

"The blue chamber is empty, sir."

"That will do excellently. Let no one know of my arrival. What time do we breakfast?"

"At eight, sir."

"Then good-night. I shall want some shaving water."

Noislessly he found his way to his bedroom, leaving the butler ejaculating:

"He always were that cool, but this beats all!"

Silence reigned in The Towers.

It was the morning of the wedding. Sir Richard Travers paced the breakfast-room, six paces forward and six back, turning on his heels with persistent regularity.

He had aged much in appearance during the last few days. The lines on his face were deeper, the furrows on his brow more decided. He halted at length by the window.

Breakfast was partially spread, and as the door opened he thought a servant entered and headed it not.

A hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Father!"

Swiftly the baronet turned.

"My dear boy!"

Who shall tell the ecstasy of joy which flooded the parent's heart, the light irradiating the careworn face, the blissful reunion with "the son who was dead and is alive again!"

"Break it gently to my mother!"

With trembling haste the baronet sought his wife.

"Maud, a great joy has come to us!"

"We shall lose one to-day, Richard!"

"Dick is not dead!"

She did not faint, only a great thankfulness crept into the mother's face, and the quiet sorrow left the kindly eyes.

"Are you sure, dear?"

"Certain!" was the jubilant response. "Here he is, ask him!"

It was an affecting scene. Sir Richard walked

from the room, leaving mother and son locked in each other's arms in a close embrace.

"Mary!"

"Yes, Sir Richard," answered a bright little maid.

"Tell Miss Maud to come here at once."

Blithely the laundress departed on her mission, returning with a look of well-simulated alarm.

"I have rapped at Miss Maud's door and have tried it, but have got no answer, Sir Richard."

Quickly the father and son dashed up the stairs.

"Rap—rap—rap! Maud!"

No answering sound was heard. Vaguely alarmed the younger gentleman seized the door and, exerting all his strength, burst in.

No Maud. Every evidence of a hurried departure—an open letter asking forgiveness.

"Mr. Bagot Dalsell."

All was consternation at The Towers as the clergyman was announced.

"I will see him," said Dick, abruptly.

"Good morning, Dalsell!"

"Why—Travers! I thought you were dead!"

"I have disappointed you, I fear. The wedding will have to be postponed. My sister cannot see you this morning."

More cadaverous looked the clergyman's face, while the green glare of his eyes told of suppressed fury.

"Cannot see me. Why?"

"She has run away!"

Quietly the words were spoken. For one instant Dalsell stood aghast ere, rising with a voice hoarse with anger, he said:

"Then I wash my hands of the whole affair. I cancel my engagement, demanding at the same time immediate redemption of the IO U's which I hold."

"The first part of your generous intimation," sarcastically replied Dick, "I will endeavour to communicate to my sister, your considerate loan shall be redeemed by this post. Good morning."

With freezing politeness he bowed the clergyman from the room. Impotent rage was stamped on the Rev. Bagot's countenance, for right well he knew that with Dick's advent a large amount of property returned to the Travers family.

There were conflicting elements of joy and sorrow in the house—joy for the returned one—sorrow for the missing.

Completely mystified, the baronet's suspicions rested upon Ernest, and acting upon impulse he suddenly started for that gentleman's London office.

Dick was standing on the steps of The Towers as the baronet departed, and he looked in no wise discomposed by the latest theory concerning the disappearance.

"You will ask Hazeldine to stay with us for a time, sir!"

But not a muscle relaxed in the baronet's face, nor did he vouchsafe an answer to the laughing remark of his son.

For a time Dick was lost in thought.

"It might have been she. Ashley! Ashley! Why, I seem to know the place, Stiggins!"

"Yes, sir. Coming, sir."

"Do you know a place by the name of Ashley?"

"Why, bless you, sir, as well as I know myself. My sister, as nursed you and Miss Maud, and was servant here for fifteen years lives there. Why, sir, now I comes to think, you and Miss Maud went to stay there years ago."

"Order the dog-cart at once," was the most irrelevant command.

Merrily rattled the dog-cart along the high road to the station, and soon Dick was bowling along the line leading to Ashley.

Just as evening shadows began to fall he stopped at the door of a picturesque little cottage.

The middle-aged woman who answered his rap instantly recognized him.

"Is she here, nurse?"

"Yes, sir. Step in here, sir."

"Do not tell her I have come, but send her in for something."

The grey light of the evening came through

the white curtains of the little room. Silently the traveller sat—patiently waiting. At length the door opened.

"Well, little runaway!"

"Oh, my darling Dick! My dear, dear brother."

Sobbing as though her heart would break, she leaned on his breast. Gently soothing her, as he might have soothed a child, he waited until the wild storm of weeping subsided. The interview between brother and sister was a long one.

"Just one thing more, Maud: Mr. Bagot Dalsell desires me to intimate that he breaks off the engagement entirely."

The terrible strain had been too much for her. She had fainted.

## CHAPTER VI.

ERNEST HAZELDINE was seated in his office in London. Hot and uncomfortable, he had not done a stroke of work satisfactorily, and a settled gloom had fallen upon his handsome face.

"Well, I suppose it is all settled now. I hope she will be happy."

Some parchment deeds were spread open on the desk before him, but the scolliguy did not seem to have special connection with him.

"Gentleman wishes to see you, sir."

"Show him in."

"Sir Richard Travers!"

Utter amazement was written on every lineament of Ernest's face. The baronet had assumed a look of austerity, yet he was somewhat taken aback by the honest surprise with which Hazeldine regarded him.

No trace of guilt was in the honest, open countenance, no flinching in the eyes which met his.

"Hazeldine, where is my daughter?"

With sheer perplexity and astonishment, Ernest regarded the baronet, while his lips slowly articulated:

"Your daughter?"

"It ill becomes you, sir, to assume an air of amazement. One would think it sufficient for any man to cajole a virtuous girl from her home and parents in the dead of the night, without playing the hypocrite or seeking by subterfuge to—"

"Silence, Sir Richard! Whatever may be the unfortunate catastrophe which has befallen your daughter, I assure you I am ignorant of the whole affair."

The steady determination of the young voice, the integrity written on every feature, staggered the violent baronet, and finally convinced him.

Taking the seat offered him and wiping the perspiration from his brow, he told Ernest the whole story, commencing with Dick's return and Maud's disappearance.

"Was this marriage obnoxious to her, Sir Richard?"

"It was imperative."

"Most probably she has taken refuge with some of her friends."

"We will hope for the best. Now, Hazeldine, I have to ask you, from Dick, to stay with us for a month."

"But, Sir Richard—"

"Nay, no buts, lad, you will come."

.....

A month sped by.

Major Travers returned from Ashley with welcome intelligence. A quiet interview with the baronet succeeded, and Maud, forgiven, was restored to home and love.

She had been ill, but the joy of meeting her brother, the loving attention, and above all the removal of care from the young life, were rapidly restoring her strength.

Ernest was still staying at The Towers, for he and Dick were firm friends. Indeed, everybody liked the good-humoured young lawyer, as everybody's manner declared. No, not everybody, Maud had become very shy and reserved to him. Yet was there ever when he came near a soft light in the averted eyes and a warm suffusion of damask cheeks which told of some strong emotion.

"Ernest, my boy, come here," called a voice from the conservatory.

"Yes, Sir Richard."

"What do you think of these plants?"

"Lovely. But I want just a word with you."

"I am at your service, Ernest."

"I love your daughter, sir, and—"

"I will have nothing more to do with these live affairs. Have you spoken to Maud?"

"No, sir."

"Then I leave it to her discretion."

Seated by an open window, with some crewel work in her hands, sat Maud Travers. The bloom and beauty of health had returned to her cheek, and she looked very lovely in the light of the setting sun.

But the light was falling, and the girl set in a reverie, gazing over the hills with a soft glad joy in the sweet eyes. Evidently her dream was a very happy one, for a smile played round her lips, when a step was heard on the balcony, and the work was instantly resumed.

"How industrious we are! It is too late to work longer, Miss Travers, and the sunset is lovely. Will you not come and see it?"

"With pleasure," was the soft, tremulous response.

Side by side they wandered down the avenue of lime trees, coming at length to a stile. Gently assisting her over, they traversed the pathway, perfectly happy in each other's presence.

"The beauty of our country makes one feel very glad, Mr. Haroldine."

"It was very beautiful five weeks since, Miss Travers, and yet one of us was unaccountably sad."

A provoking sun-bonnet hid the face his misanthropic eyes desired to see.

"You must not remind me of those days, they are inexpressibly painful to me. I only desire to forget them."

"And the boating excursion?"

Again the sun-bonnet protruded itself. Placing himself so as to stop her further advance along the pathway, he gently removed the objectionable hat, and his handsome face was bent down close to the uncovered head as he whispered,—

"Must it all be forgotten?"

"Forgetfulness is not imperative," was the cool response.

"Then will you tell me why you were so sad on that last evening of my stay?"

"You know."

"Has all the sadness gone?"

"Yes." The pleading eyes were raised to his.

"Do not ask me any more."

"Only one more question," he tenderly replied.

"Will you answer it?"

"If I can."

The sweet, shy eyes had drooped, and the head was bowed. Something told her as he took possession of her hands what that one question would be, and she feared lest he should discover her secret.

"Maud, do you love me?"

"Yes."

No one but Ernest could have heard the tremulous whisper, and he sealed the confession with a kiss. Folding her in his arms in one long embrace, oblivious to all but the bliss of having won the love of the sweet girl who had promised to be his wife, he was quite unaware that a gentleman in clerical garb stood a silent spectator of the scene.

Slowly they wandered their way back to The Towers, the pure, happy face by Ernest's side raised to his in loving confidence.

"And you will not run away, my darling?"

The only response was a provoking pout which had to be kissed away, and a soft pressure of her arm assured him he had nothing to fear.

The golden leaves of autumn were robing the trees in a foliage of gold, when a wedding was solemnized in the little church of Blingley.

As Ernest led his bride from the church, Squire Malfarn, with his ruddy, jovial face beaming with pleasure, met Sir Richard Travers in the porch. For one instant they hesitated,

then, grasping each other by the hand, abandoned for ever the old feud of "right of way."

The families at The Towers and The Hall were once more reunited, and the union in the years which followed, was rich in love and happiness.

[THE END.]

## PARTED BY TREACHERY.

—301—

(Continued from page 151.)

After one of these night raids, as she was going from one tent—where she had made all the wounded comfortable—to another, she saw an officer being brought in, for the moon had risen, and it was almost as light as day, and as she paused, wondering if she could help this new victim of the enemy's cunning and treachery, she heard him say in low, laboured tones, that were strangely familiar to her,

"Doctor, tell me the truth, am I mortally wounded?"

"It is no use deceiving you, Vane," returned the doctor, "you are."

"My husband?" murmured Bina.

"Have I long to live?" he continued, still more faintly.

"Not half-an-hour," returned the other, reluctantly.

"Then, when I am gone, send this packet and note to the lady whose name is on it. Promise me faithfully to do this?"

"There is no need," cried his wife, falling on her knees beside him, "I am here."

For a moment the gleaming eyes look up into hers without recognition, the cap and dress altered her appearance so greatly; then he murmured,—

"Bina!"

"Yes, it is I."

"And—and—you—forgive me!"

"Willingly, fully."

"I—did—you—a—cruel—wrong," he whispered, hoarsely.

"Don't speak of it," she implored, holding a cup to his lips. "Take this."

"It is—useless. My minutes—are—numbered."

"Don't speak," she urged, raising his head on her arm, as the blood gushed out from his wounded breast.

"I—must—time—short. Wife," with an effort to lift himself, "one—kiss—of—your—own—accord."

She bent her lips to his, holding him close in her arms.

And so he died; his head on her breast, his lips kissed by hers. His relaxing arms told the story, and gently she laid him down, and gave the necessary directions to some of his men concerning the removal of his body to the capital.

She felt a great sorrow for him, but had not much time to grieve. Her hands were full, so many requiring her attention that it left her little leisure. Directly the war was over she went up to Alexandria, where the hospital was still full, and nurses greatly needed. Daily she went through the wards, soothing the sick and dying with her gentle touch, her kind words, and ever looking for the one face her eyes yearned to see.

One morning she came into the ward, pacing slowly down between the rows of little beds, with their ghastly, pale-faced occupants, when suddenly she was startled by a loud shriek, and turning, saw a man struggling violently with one of the orderlies, and apparently trying to get to her.

In a moment she was at his side.

"Peard!"

She laid her hand caressingly on his head—his struggles ceased as if by magic.

"I knew you would come at last," he said, looking up at her. "Only you have been such a long, long time."

And then he relapsed into delirium, and for days and nights she never left him, fighting

death inch by inch for possession of him, and at last she was victorious. Peard was sane and out of danger, only very, very weak. She took him from the hospital to some cheerful rooms, and continued her ministrations.

"Bi," he said one day, when he was better, catching her hand as she handed him something, "tell me, what was it parted us?"

And she told him the whole story quietly and gently, reserving nothing, for she had examined the packet Major Vane had left, and found that the girl supposed to be Peard's cousin and the rightful owner of Lockhart Hall was an illegitimate child of his uncle, Mr. Lockhart's wife never having had a family. Vane had known this, but had kept the secret, knowing that by doing so he could force Bina into a marriage with him.

"My noble darling," cried Peard, when she had finished, drawing her into his arms. "You sacrificed yourself for me!"

"Yes, Peard, for you."

"How can I thank you! How can I show you what I feel!"

"Don't try, please," she said, simply, hiding a blushing face on his shoulder.

"But I must. And now, tell me," putting his hand under her chin, and turning up her face so that he could look into the beautiful blue eyes, "is there anything to keep us apart now—anything between us?"

"Nothing," she answered, softly, drawing the moonstone ring from her finger and placing it on his.

"My beloved, mine at last!" he cried, rapturously, kissing the lips that were now his own.

They were married a few weeks later, and sailed for England at once, and there were great rejoicings at Tracey Place and Lockhart Hall on their arrival as man and wife after all they had suffered and gone through.

In the years to come, there was the patter of little feet at the Hall, and the ring of childish voices. And Bina, in the joy of her love and motherhood, forgot those dark days when she had sacrificed herself for her children's father.

[THE END.]

## HER FATHER'S SECRETARY.

—301—

### CHAPTER XLVII.

"The world will be none the darker because you are out of it!" pursued Gwen, "and who will miss a life as valueless as yours!"

"No one, that is sure," replied Marie, with white, stiffening lips, speaking with the greatest difficulty.

"Certainly not," responded Gwen, promptly.

"I am glad you realize that."

"I ought to be glad to leave a world that is

hard enough at best," said Marie.

"That is the first sensible remark that I have heard you make," cried Gwen, with a shrill laugh that made the cold perspiration stand out in heavy beads on Marie's face and the blood to turn almost to ice in her veins. "The world is such a dreary place; to die should be counted a great privilege."

"But how am I to die?" murmured Marie, in a faint voice, choking back the wild sob that rose to her lips as she framed the words.

"I have not quite thought that out," replied Gwen, meditatively. "Have you any way to suggest?"

A wild hope sprang up in Marie's heart.

"I will tell you," she cried, tremulously. "We will both go down to the bridge that spans the river, and I will throw myself in first, and then you can—"

"No!" cut in Gwen, with a look of subtle cunning in her eyes—"no, you are not to leave this room! Did you suppose for a moment that I would let you pass that threshold?" and into the maddened, gleaming eyes of the madcap came a look that made the flesh on Marie's bones fairly creep with intense terror. "I have given



the subject of self-destruction much thought," continued Gwen, keeping her glittering eyes fastened keenly upon Marie, "and I know a hundred ways."

"I am sure you do," ventured Marie, faintly realizing that her precious life was at stake, and that at all hazards she must keep up a lively strain of conversation in order to prolong time.

"I have made it a great study," pursued Gwen, "and I have mastered it. Death should be instantaneous—quite as quick as an electric shock, if it should be so accomplished."

"Ah, Heaven!" gasped Marie, under her breath, "send me help, or let me drop dead quickly! This torture will soon drive me as mad as she is!"

Ah! if help would but come!

Marie looked at the door. The daring, wild thought flitted through her brain that she might at one bound spring to the door, fling it open, and dash down the corridor.

She measured the space accurately with her eyes, and involuntarily took a quick step forward; but in an instant Gwen was beside her with a hiss that made her shriek aloud with terror, and two hands, like bands of steel, were pressing her neck.

She dared not resist by the faintest struggle, or show any resistance, although she could feel the breath leaving her body.

She knew she would be no match in strength for the insane woman whose white fingers were bound so tightly about her neck.

Ah! let death come quickly—quickly! was her wild, silent prayer.

Suddenly the white hands, so like bands of steel, loosed their terrible grip from about her neck.

"Did you think to escape me!" hissed the insane woman, froth flecking her lips and her eyes fairly glaring. "Hail did you dare think of escaping!"

"Oh, no," replied Marie, trembling like an aspen leaf, and her teeth chattering audibly, "I had no thought of leaving you. I—I—thought I saw the door ajar ever so slightly, and that there was some one listening on the outside. I—I—simply meant to close the door. No one must listen to what we have to say, you know."

"Certainly not," cried Gwen, shrilly; "it would be death to any one whom I found listening; and with those words she glided like a pantheress to the door, flung it open wide, and, standing in the door-way, peered cautiously up and down the corridor.

Marie measured her chances of flinging her aside with one powerful blow, springing past her, and gaining her liberty, but at the very instant in which she decided to take the leap that meant life or death to her, Gwen turned swiftly round, closed the door, turned the key with an ominous click, drew it from the lock, and thrust it into her pocket.

With what horror Marie watched her, no words have power to describe.

"I am lost—lost!" was the wild, despairing cry that rose to her lips; but she dared not utter the words, for Gwen was at her side again.

"There is no one outside," she said; "we are quite alone; we can discuss the matter in hand unheard, unheeded."

"What was it about—plants?" ventured Marie, hoping and praying against hope that Gwen might have forgotten, or that she could lead her thoughts very deftly into other channels.

Ah, if Heaven would but send her help quickly!

"You are mad, or dreaming!" cried Gwen, with a touch of anger. "We were talking of how I had best kill you, for this is your last moment, you know."

Marie tried to speak, but her tongue cleaved to the roof of her mouth.

Ah, what torture of mind a human being can pass through in the space of one brief moment of time!

Happening to glance into a pier-glass opposite, Marie's heart almost stood still to see that her hair, which was black as a raven's wing when she crossed that threshold, had turned to a snow white, caused by the awful terror which she was undergoing.

"I have thought of an excellent method of doing the work," pursued Gwen. "See!"

As she uttered the exclamation, she drew from the coils of her dark, curling hair a long, thin silver pin.

"This plunged into the heart would produce death as painless as instantaneous," she went on, slowly. "We shall try it at all events."

"Do—do—you think that the best method?" breathed Marie, quaking with wild alarm, but not daring to draw back or show the least fear as Gwen pressed it close to the region of her fluttering heart.

"Do you know of a better one?" inquired insane Gwen, sharply; "speak quickly if you do."

Ah! how should she answer her! Her very life depended upon her quickness of thought.

"Yes," she replied, promptly, "this is a very old way; we were speaking of employing a new method, were we not?"

The white hand that held the long, thin silver pin poised so daintily was slightly withdrawn from the cruelly dangerous position directly over Marie's throbbing heart.

"Let me hear about it," said Gwen, studying her face with all the cunning and keenness that the insane usually regard those with whom they are speaking.

"It is a difficult way, but it is grand. People who die that way are very grateful, because their souls always wander back and find resting-places in the hearts of roses."

"That is a very poetic and beautiful fancy," murmured Gwen, adding, quickly: "If you die painlessly I shall take the same course. I should like my spirit to return and live in the heart of a rose; but you have not mentioned how it is to be done."

"One must gather a nosegay of roses and— and one of weeds," began Marie, making the idea up in her busy brain as she went along.

"The roses must be those great blood-red ones. I think you have some in the garden down below."

"Well," said Gwen, impatiently, "go on with the formula; one must gather a handful of roses and one of weeds. What then?"

"And place each of them in half a glass of water, letting them remain for at least ten minutes, until all the sap is drawn from both flowers and weeds into the water."

"Ah, Heaven! ah, pitying Heaven! why did not help come!" was the mental cry that welled silently up from Marie's tortured heart.

"Why do you hesitate!" cried Gwen shrilly, eyeing her suspiciously; "what is wrong! Don't you know what is to be done then?"

"Yes," murmured Marie; "both flowers and weeds are then flung aside and the waters in both glasses are mixed and drained. Death is the result!"

"I do not doubt but that would be very well, but as we have no flowers handy we shall have to abandon the idea," said Gwen, decisively.

"But there are flowers in the garden just below the window," said Marie, eagerly. "Ah, just think of it: death through the agency of beautiful flowers! Is not the thought a sweet one?"

"I do not like the idea of weeds," retorted Gwen, with a shrill cry. "I would not have them about."

Ah! how sorry Marie was that she had been so unfortunate as to mention weeds. She remembered once of reading that the bare mention of anything insane persons dislike makes them almost fiends incarnate; and she hastened to add,—

"Many people just discard the water of the weeds and drink only the water drained from the roses. The result is quite the same."

"No," replied Gwen, sharply, "that will not do; we have no roses here, and you shall not go into the grounds for them. You must not pass out of this room."

"Then you go, and I will await you here," said Marie.

"We shall neither of us leave the room. This long, thin silver pin will answer the purpose," and as she spoke Gwen uplifted her arm and struck swiftly. There was a wild cry, and the

sound of a heavy falling body; then all was still in the room.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

MARIE had been mistaken, fortunately, in believing the little maid, whom she had succeeded in pushing past in the corridor, had swooned.

The moment Marie had disappeared up the stairway she was on her feet, and hearing the excited voices in the corridor above, rushed quickly from the house and out into the street in hopes of meeting some one of the family, or some friend, to whom she might relate the story of the woman who had pushed past her, fairly forcing her way into young Mrs. Dane's presence, and the high words which had ensued.

She was fortunate enough to meet the gardener and one of the grooms, and to them the maid breathlessly related her story, and brought them back to the house with her at once.

"She has been with my lady some twenty minutes already," panted the girl, "and she will be more than angry that I have not summoned some one ere this to her aid and put the impertinent creature out of the house; but I had to run so far before meeting any one! Come, make haste; we shall be fully ten minutes longer in getting to the house."

Three-quarters of an hour! Ah, how much may happen in that time! Many a life has drifted out of the world within the lapse of fewer moments—from health and strength hurled down into the dark mystery of death.

Three-quarters of an hour Marie had been in that room, and the last half-hour of it had almost robbed her of reason.

It was the last straw that broke the camel's back—the last limit of the horrible tension her nerves were undergoing—when Gwen, whose violent insanity was growing more intense and dangerous with each passing moment, sprang towards her with the uplifted instrument of death.

One terrible cry broke from Marie's death-cold lips—one awful cry for help—and then a horrible darkness closed in around her, and she fell at Gwen's feet, unmindful that she was at her assailant's mercy.

That cry rang out wildly through the wide corridors, and was answered by a great shout from below. There was the sound of hurrying feet, and the next moment the two servants, followed by the terrified maid, had reached their young mistress's door.

Within, all was as still as death.

"Heaven!" cried one of the men, "the door is locked, and upon the inside."

"There is but one way to do," returned the other; "we must force open the door. Come; put your shoulder to the panel."

This was no sooner said than done.

The door fell in with a great crash, and none of the three who stood there transfixed for a single instant to the spot ever forgot the sight to their dying day. The woman who had pushed past the maid lay prone upon the floor, either dead or in a dead faint.

She had evidently been disguised, for the cap she wore, together with the grey wig and blue glasses, lay on the floor beside her.

But it was not this which caught and held their attention—it was Gwen, their young mistress. She was bending over the fallen woman, raining lightning-like blows upon her with a long, thin, sharp instrument that looked like a dagger to them.

Heaven was kind to Marie; the steel of her corset caused the instrument to glance aside each time wide of its mark; but this the frenzied woman who bent over her did not notice or realize.

It took the united strength of both the groom and the gardener to disarm Gwen and hold her until more help could be summoned.

"Young Mrs. Dane has gone stark mad! Heaven save and protect the beautiful young lady!" they murmured to each other, holding her as gently as they could.

But little attention was paid to Marie, save to dash water angrily in her face, and cry out to her

when she opened her eyes and gazed around her in bewilderment, that she should suffer the full penalty of what she had done, saying she had driven young Mrs. Dane insane.

Marie struggled to her feet, and tried, in a few broken words, to tell them all; but they would not listen, and in the excitement of the moment, in having a severe struggle with Gwen, who had almost wrested herself from their grasp, Marie made her escape from the room and out of the house, taking care, however, to secure the confession Gwen had fortunately written before she had swallowed the draught which had cost her her reason.

"I shall be in time to save poor little Gladys, I hope, and this confession will be the means of it," she muttered, clutching the half-written page tightly, and hurrying breathlessly up the street to the court-house.

No one noticed the dishevelled figure in black that made its way into the crowded court-room, so intense was the excitement at that moment in Gladys's trial, for it was at this instant that the jurors who held poor Gladys's fate in their hands filed slowly into the room.

Not a sound broke the appalling stillness, painful in its intensity, in the crowded room save the slow tread of the twelve good and true men who slowly filed to their places.

It all seemed like a dream to Gladys. Ah! why did women weep and strong men turn pale and bow their heads as they watched the expression of those twelve faces?

There was nothing but sorrow and deep emotion on each one.

As one hears a voice in a dream, Gladys heard the question,—

"Have you found a verdict, gentlemen?"

And she heard, too, in a deep, husky voice, the words,—

"We have."

"Do you find the prisoner at the bar innocent or guilty?"

There was an instant of utter silence, then, like a low, moaning wind among a forest of trees, came deep sobs from every part of the vast room. The intensity of the scene was terrible; even the sobbing ceased, and every eye was turned upon the stern, pale man who turned his head quite away from Gladys as he answered the question:—

"Guilty."

There was a terrible cry near the doorway that cut in upon the foreman's verdict and drowned it.

"Hold!" cried a woman's voice in a wild cry—"hold! in the name of mercy and justice! I can prove the innocence of the prisoner at the bar! In the name of the angels listen to what I have to say!"

And as she spoke she made her way through the dense crowd to the judge's desk.

"Why, it is Marie," Gwen's maid, or rather, the girl who was once Gwen's maid, whispered Mrs. Melville to her husband. "What can she have to say? What does she know of the burning of The Mount, I wonder?"

Mr. Melville looked curiously at the girl, and somehow an icy wave seemed to sweep over his heart—a sensation that always came to him like a forewarning of coming evil.

At the next moment his premonition was verified.

"Listen—both judge, jury, and populace!" cried Marie, excitedly. "I am here to prove to you that the prisoner yonder never committed the crime for which she is held here. The Mount was burned by a torch applied to it by the hand of Gwendolen Dane!"

The effect of these words was intense. Hoarse cries and shouts and a Babel of voices drowned Marie's, also the shouting voice of Mr. Melville, who vowed if he could but reach the woman who uttered that infamous lie—woman though she was—he would choke the lie upon her lips!

For a time it seemed as if almost a riot had been created, so great was the excitement. Women fainted, and men cursed in their endeavours to clear a passage through the excited, surging crowd to carry them out into the fresh, pure air.

Mr. Melville, in his mad frenzy, drew his

revolver; but before he could aim it at the woman, who took her place, pale and calm, he was hurried through the court-room, followed by his hysterical wife.

And when something like order was restored, Marie, in a calm, clear voice told her marvellous story—the story from beginning to end of beautiful Gwen's crime.

The breathless interest of the vast concourse of people was too intense even for an exclamation when she told the thrilling story of what happened at midnight at the Black Pool, and how Gladys was lured to the tower and there confined a prisoner until after the marriage was over; and then, the last and most cowardly act, of how Gwen had attempted to remove all trace of her crime by the terrible fire.

Gladys had listened like one turned to stone, but as Marie described with thrilling pathos that terrible conflagration, and what the girl's agony must have been when she realised the doom which must be hers, because no means of escape seemed possible, Gladys jumped to her feet with a ringing cry that almost transfixed all that heard it.

"Oh, I remember—I remember all now! The awful fire, and Rupert coming to save me—the black volumes of smoke—the awful glare of the fiery tongues of flame! Yes, it was Gwen who tried to murder me at the Black Pool, who lured me to the tower and made me a prisoner there!"

#### CHAPTER XLIX.

The thrilling scene which had transpired in the court almost electrified the simple village folk.

In less than an hour's time every one had heard of it, and was discussing it, and telling each other in whispers of poor little Gladys's innocence, and of Gwen's crime, and the horrible retribution—insanity—that had overtaken her.

Every one asked how Rupert Dane had taken it, and then those who had been eye-witnesses in the densely-crowded court, told how he had risen to his feet deathly pale as Marie had proceeded with her story.

He had listened like one almost petrified until she had reached the very end of her narrative, and then the bitterest groan that ever was heard fell from his lips.

He had crossed over to where Gladys sat, pale and trembling.

"I thank Heaven you are acknowledged innocent before the world, as I have always firmly believed you to be," he said, huskily, then turned and made his way through the crowded court-room to his home.

Mr. Melville and his weeping wife were awaiting him in the library, but the servants told how he hurried past it, going at once to his wife's room.

He sent the attendant into another apartment; but he did not close the door or draw the portieres; he seemed quite to forget her near presence and that she could hear all that transpired.

Gwen was standing by the window, looking out listlessly over the sunlit garden. He stepped up to her and laid a heavy hand on her arm.

She turned slowly, but there was no smile on her face, no glad cry of surprise and joy as in the past when her eyes fell upon the face of him whom she loved so well.

When he met the dazed, uncertain stare of those dark eyes, as he realised that the light of reason had fled, all the bitter rage and horror that had filled his heart against her when he had discovered her sin, melted into the deepest pity.

Despite her crimes in attempting to murder Gladys and in setting fire to The Mount, a wave of deep regret swept through his heart at the cruel fate that had overtaken her.

Why should he not pity her? She was his wife—the young wife who, despite his coldness, had loved him with so idolatrous a love that the angels in heaven might have wept for her.

Poor Gwen! poor girl! Even in that pitiful moment he thought of the words he had so often

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FEMALE PILLS

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no irritant, and have the approval of the Medical Profession.

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They at once check the Cough

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fail. Invaluable to women. By post, under cover, for

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Hagley Road, Birmingham. Please mention LONDON

READER.



heard on her lips—words that had been wont to touch her heart and always bring the tears to her beautiful eyes when she uttered them:

"What is there in such agony as this  
Better than the unconsciousness of those  
Who, never loving, dream not of its bliss,  
And, never losing, taste not of its woes.  
Ah! me! how oft I've thought 'twere better far  
Never to love, than love to lose again;  
Better to have a sky without a star,  
Than for one setting weep in bitter pain."

Life's star had set for Gwen. Ah, Heaven! the pity of it, and she so young and fair, and she had loved him so!

He had come to her with bitter, scathing words on his lips and abhorrence in his heart; but the words stuck in his throat as he met the far-away stare of those listless, dusk eyes.

"Gwen, my poor Gwen!" he said, in a voice husky with emotion, holding out his arms to her.

She did not spring into them, and nestle her dark, curly head against his shoulder. His voluntary offer of a caress had come to her too late.

"Too late for repine when the doom has been spoken,  
Too late for the balm when the heart is broken."

"Gwen," he murmured again, "do you not know me? I am Rupert—your husband."

She drew back from him and looked at him wistfully.

"I have been watching the sun shining on the roses," she murmured, "and one of them, that great red rose yonder, bending to and fro quite aloof from the rest, in folds my heart and soul in its tender crimson leaves. When Rupert comes you must point it out to him. Say to him, the soul of Gwen is in that rose, and when the dew is on it they are Gwen's tears."

Rupert dropped into the nearest seat, and groaned aloud.

Ah, Heaven! this was terrible, terrible!—almost more than he could bear. He caught her fluttering, outstretched hands and attempted to draw her toward him, but she resisted him.

"You must not touch me!" she cried. "Roses are too fragile for the touch of rude hands."

He tried to talk with her—tried to comfort her, and to break the dark clouds that obscured her mind, but he realized it was quite useless.

Each moment the strange idea that her spirit was entombed in the heart of a red rose took a greater hold upon her, and at last in despair he left her.

Both Rupert and Gwen's parents objected strenuously to have her conveyed to an asylum. They engaged the kindest but strictest keepers for her, and had her conveyed to the western wing of the villa, where the sun shone all day and the birds sang among the trees outside, but where there were no roses in view to distract her thoughts.

Expert specialists had been sent for, and one after the other gave up her case as hopeless. Each and every one expressed the belief that her insanity was incurable.

"She might have a long life before her," they said, "but never through all the long years that might come and go would the clouds be lifted from her mind."

And every one who loved her cried out in secret, that in this Heaven had been kind to her and had spared her, for if the clouds should break away, the law would lay its heavy cross upon her, and she would occupy the prison cell that she had intended for poor Gladys.

Both Rupert and Gwen's father bore up bravely under their crushing sorrow, but the shock had been too great a one to Mrs. Melville for her to overcome it, and one week from the day this crushing sorrow had come to her they buried her under the willows in the country churchyard.

She had died with the name of her beloved Gwen upon her lips. She had begged pitiously to have her darling brought to her. Each day they had told her she should see Gwen on the morrow. No one dared tell her that Gwen's condition had changed alarmingly, and for the worse.

Her one cry had been for Gladys, and she

refused to take food or sustenance of any kind from any other hand.

Rupert and Mrs. Melville had looked at each other with white faces, asking each other what was to be done.

"There is but one thing to do," gravely returned the doctor who had charge of poor Gwen, "and that is to induce the young girl she asks for to come to her. She might do a great deal of good, and perhaps avert much harm."

"This Gladys is my daughter's bitterest foe," cried out Mr. Melville. "I would rather almost see my darling lying dead at my feet than see that girl gloating over her downfall," he added, with a stormy imprecation.

"It is quite a common occurrence for them to call for their enemies in cases like this," returned the doctor; "but I repeat that the presence of these self-same avowed foes is a benefit, for they possess a sort of attraction for them, and a power to quiet violent paroxysms. I should say, induce this young girl to come to your wife, Mr. Dane, if it is in your power."

Mr. Melville bowed his head in grim silence, but the swelling of the great knotted cords on his forehead revealed how intense his grief was as he listened to the piteous cries in the inner apartment and the angry voice of Gwen calling over and over again for Gladys.

"What shall I do, mother?" said Rupert, huskily, at last. "You must advise me."

Mrs. Dane looked into her son's face.

"I know your secret, Rupert," she whispered, laying her hand on his fair, bowed head as he bent over her. "I read it in your anguished eyes when Gladys's face looked so dark. Although wedded to poor Gwen, you have not got over your love for Gladys yet, and the thought of her being under this roof with Gwen is appalling to you, and especially after all that has occurred. Am I not right, my boy?"

As she spoke, she looked anxiously into his clouded blue eyes, hoping against hope that he would be able to say "No" to this charge.

For a moment he was silent, and she saw his face grow pale.

He lifted his head slowly, and looked at her calmly, steadily.

"I will not attempt to deceive you, mother. You shall know the whole truth," he said. "I will not deny that I love Gladys—ay! I love her with a love so desperate, so despairing, that at times I feel frightened at myself."

"Heaven alone knows how I have fought against it. I thought myself strong in will-power, but one glance at Gladys's sweet pale face unmans me; my resolutions are swept away like withered leaves in a gale."

"Now you know all, mother, and I repeat that I leave it to you whether or not I shall ask Gladys to come to minister to my poor wife."

"You have no choice in the matter, Rupert. You must put yourself entirely outside of the question, and think only of Gwen and her needs. You must overcome your love for Gladys, and the sooner you begin the heroic struggle, which must end in victory over your own self, the better. You must not shrink from the ordeal, but face it manfully. You have left the matter with me, and I say, bring Gladys here."

(To be continued.)

A FRENCHMAN has just patented a paper-bag material impervious to water, the ordinary wrapping being coated with gas-tar, and the layer of tar covered with a thin sheet of tissue or similar paper, so that the tar does not come in contact with the contents of the bag.



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## FAÇETIEZ.

SHARP: "I never pay old debts." Friend: "And new ones!" Sharp: "I let them grow old."

In a country newspaper we find the following cheery passage:—"A number of deaths are unavoidably postponed."

LITTLE GIRL (to her mamma): "What is a dead letter, please?" Mamma: "One that has been given to your father to post."

MAMMA: "Why did you give the baby that drum?" Papa: "Because he makes less noise when he has the drum."

"THIS is the bill from your oculist," said the collector to Mr. Grim. Mr. Grim: "Just take it back, and tell him that I can't read it with those glasses I got from him."

"Ha," screamed the orator, "who puts his hand to the plough must not turn back." "What's he to do when he gets to the end of the furrow?" asked a rustic listener.

"I HAVE heard that she walks in her sleep," said the gossip. "Indeed!" returned Mrs. Farvenue scornfully. "So common, isn't it? I should think she would ride."

MRS. WACKUM: "How did that naughty boy of yours hurt himself?" Mrs. Snapper: "That good little boy of yours hit him on the head with a brick."

BLINKERS: "Hello, Winkers. I hear you married a woman with an independent fortune." Winkers (sadly): "N—o; I married a fortune with an independent woman."

LADY (Interviewing servant): "I may tell you that we are all vegetarians. I suppose you are not one?" Servant (anxious to be engaged): "Oh yes, mum, I've attended a vegetarian chapel all me life."

EMPLOYER (to little Billy Ducks, just left school, who applies for situation as office-boy and produces testimonial from clergyman): "We don't want you on Sundays, my good little boy. Have you a reference from anyone who knows you on week-days?"

## TO THE DEAF.

A Gentleman who has cured numerous cases of Deafness and Noise in the Head after many years suffering, will gladly send full particulars of the remedy, on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.

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EXQUISITE MODELS.  
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GUARANTEED WEAR.

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DIAGONAL SEAM  
CORSETS.

Will not split in the seams nor tear in the fabric.

Made in White, Black, and all the Fashionable Colours and Shades in Italian Cloth, Satin, and Coutil.

4/11, 5/11, 6/11, 7/11  
per pair and upwards.

THREE GOLD MEDALS.  
Sold by the principal Drapers and Ladies' Outfitters.

## SOCIETY.

THREE new shiels or cottages are to be erected before the Queen returns to Balmoral next spring. Her Majesty has chosen the sites.

THE Emperor of Austria is to spend the month of February at Abbazia, on the Austrian Riviera, and will be accompanied there by his youngest daughter, the Archduchess Valerie, and her husband.

It is on the cards that the King of Denmark may in December make a quiet visit to the Prince and Princess of Wales at Sandringham, and that he may go later to Athens. Everything however, depends upon his Majesty's health.

SIX months will have elapsed, before the London season practically begins, owing to the death of her Majesty Queen Louise. The Princess of Wales may, if things are likely to be dull, appear at Court in May and fulfil some public engagements.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales will make Sandringham their headquarters for many weeks. In January it is thought that their Royal Highnesses will go South, and that they will visit King George and Queen Olga at Athens.

THERE is only one woman admiral in the world, the Queen of Greece. She holds this rank in the Russian navy, an honorary appointment conferred upon her by the late Czar, because her father held the rank of high admiral.

THE Czar of Russia probably owns a greater quantity of china than any other person in the world. He has the china belonging to all the Russian rulers as far back as Catherine the Great. It is stored in an immense closet in the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg.

KING OSCAR of Sweden is a brilliant talker, a clever musician, a keen sportsman, an accomplished man of letters; and the Queen is a veritable angel of mercy, who, while her strength lasted, was unwavering in works of benevolence. Of late years, unfortunately, Queen Sophie has been a great invalid, and has been compelled to lead the quietest life possible, rarely taking part in Court functions; but even to-day her interest in charitable work is undiminished, and her husband's people regard her as their good angel.

QUEEN MARGARET OF ITALY owns, next to the ex-Queen of Hanover, the finest necklace of pearls in existence. She does not, like her deposed majesty of Hanover, possess a six-foot string of these love beads, every one an absolute match in shape and colour, but so extensive and precious are her pearl ropes that her maids are obliged to wear a portion of the collection all the while in order to assist the Queen in keeping the gems pure, lustrous and healthy by constant contact with warm human flesh.

AMONG the exhibits which will shortly be on view at the South Kensington Museum is a lithograph of the Princess Royal of England, now the Empress Frederick, which possesses no common interest for the British public, for it is signed "V.R. del. and lith. Fek. 1846," and was executed by the Queen herself. When the newly-married Princess of Rouss (née Feodora of Saxe-Meiningen) visits our shores, as she is expected to do, that relic of the past ought to be shown to her, for the little girl of four and a half years old delineated in that picture is her august grandmother, and the portrait and her lithograph were the work of her great-grandmother, then a young and happy wife, mother, and monarch.

BOTH the German Emperor and Empress are great lovers of flowers, and great numbers of them are employed every day for the decoration of the Imperial dinner table. The receptacles in which they are placed consist of silver vases, simple wire baskets, and small vases of cut glass, and the flowers most generally used are roses, carnations, lilies of the valley, Alpine violets, anemones, and ranunculus. Large numbers of orchids are also used, but these must have long stalks, so as to give an impression of lightness to the general effect. When banquets are given to about two or three hundred guests, it is usual to place a vase to every two guests; but for small dinners a great many more are used in proportion.

## STATISTICS.

THERE are said to be more than 1,437 cycling clubs in England alone.

IN very clear water sunlight penetrates to a depth of over 1,500 feet.

OF 1,000 deaths in Europe, 16 are by violence; in the United States 41.

FIFTY thousand Bank of England notes are on the average made daily.

THE delivery to the House of Commons post-office is said to amount to between 7,000 and 10,000 letters daily.

## GEMS.

THE true reward of a workman is not his wages, but the consciousness of having done a good job.

AFTER a man has made a good record for himself, it is time enough to hunt up the pedigree somebody has left him.

TILL a man can judge whether they be truth or no, his understanding is but little improved, and thus men of much reading are greatly learned, but may be little knowing.

FRIENDSHIP'S responsibilities are next to those of marriage. Loyalty, patience, charity, comfort, adaptation, gentleness, thoughtfulness, unselfishness, sympathy, loving rebuke of evil—the exercise of all these and more qualities and attributes are obligatory in him who calls himself a friend.

DUTY is a debt—something that we owe to somebody else. There isn't an important duty in life that needs to wait for the solution of any man's doubt. There isn't a single duty that needs to wait for the solution of any man's doubt. There isn't a single duty that needs to wait for the settlement of any question. Do not allow yourselves, then, to make excuses. Doubt that which is not proved; believe that which is probable; have faith in that whose past gives a reason for faith; be not credulous.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CRACKER PUDDING.—Split a few large crackers, cover the surface over with raisins and place the halves together, tie closely in a cloth, and boil fifteen minutes. Serve with a rich sauce.

SPICED TOMATOES.—Twenty ripe tomatoes, scalded and peeled, two quarts vinegar, eight pounds sugar, four table spoonfuls each of cinnamon, cloves and allspice. Boil until thick, stirring often.

PICKLED RED CABBAGE.—Slice cabbage into a collander, sprinkle each layer with salt, let it drain two days, then put into a jar, pour boiling vinegar enough to cover, put in a few slices of red beet-root. Choose purple red cabbage. Cauliflower cut in bunches and thrown in after being salted will look red and beautiful.

EGG BALLS.—Boil four eggs for ten minutes, put them into cold water. When quite cold, shell and put the yolks into a mortar with the yolk of a raw egg, a spoonful of flour, one spoonful of parsley, chopped, a little salt, a dash of cayenne and a few leaves of tarragon. Rub all well together, make into balls, and drop into boiling water. These make a good garnish for a dish of fish.

SAUCE FOR PLUM PUDDING.—Break two eggs, yolks and whites together, in a saucepan. Stir in just as much brown sugar as they will take up. Add half a pint of cream or rich milk, a pinch of salt and one nutmeg, grated. Boil until thick. Just before serving add one table-spoonful fine butter, one wineglass of brandy, and as much good cooking wine as will make it about the thickness of boiled custard.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE favourite method of fishing in China is with a trained cormorant.

THE grave of an unmarried woman in Turkey is often indicated by a rose carved in stone.

A BERLIN watchmaker has perfected a mechanism capable of measuring and recording the 1,000th part of a second.

THE tiger's strength exceeds that of the lion. Five men can easily hold down a lion, but nine are required to hold a tiger.

THE smallest salary paid to the head of a civilised Government is £3 a year to the President of the Republic of Andorra in the Pyrenees.

NEARLY all Russian leather is tanned with birch bark. This gives it the peculiar pleasant odour which is so admired, and at the same time protects it from insects.

ONE of the largest forests in the world stands on ice. It is situated between Ural and the Okhotsk Sea. A well was recently dug in that region, when it was found that at a depth of 850 feet the ground was still frozen.

A FRENCH doctor has invented an electric helmet inside of which is a small motor that vibrates strips of steel, the motor making 600 turns per minute. This whirling is supposed to cure nervous headache, and put the sufferer to sleep.

A BERLIN patent agency announces that a Polish engineer has found a method of chemically treating straw in such a way that it can be pressed into a substance as hard as stone and cheaper than wood paving, for which it is expected to prove a substitute.

A SACK-FILLING machine has been invented which not only fills the sacks with flour or grain, but weighs it and registers the number filled. It will not attempt to put more in than the sack will hold; and tended by a single man the machine will dispose of sixty sacks an hour.

THERE are no more conservative people in the matter of dress and family customs than the Dutch, and their little queen has become doubly dear to them through her devotion to the quaint national dress and her love for many other of the time-honoured customs.

CAREFULLY collected figures show that the proportion of cavalry to the other arms has been steadily diminishing for a long period. The artillery has been increased, the cavalry diminished. Austria, Turkey, and Spain are the only countries whose cavalry exceeds their artillery force.

AT Roubaix, one of the Socialist strongholds of France, the 11,000 public-school children receive free food and clothing at the expense of the town. Their dinner at school consists of soup, bread, vegetables, meat, and a glass of wine. At the beginning of summer and of winter each child receives a complete suit of clothes.

IN Nagasaki, Japan, there is a fireworks-maker who manufactures pyrotechnic birds of great size that, when exploded, sail in a lifelike manner through the air and perform many movements exactly like those of living birds. The secret of making these wonderful fireworks has been in the possession of the eldest child of the family of each generation for more than 400 years.

IN India only, of all the countries of the world, is the much-talked-of marriage-knot ever actually tied. Among the Brahmins marriage is a matter of purchase, and the would-be bridegroom is liable almost to the last moment to be ousted by a higher bidder; but, if no suitor appears willing to give the father a more valuable present, he leads his daughter to the first to offer himself, saying: "I have no longer anything to do with you; I give you up to the power of another." Then the bridegroom looses the tall, the insignia of marriage, round her neck, and secures it with a knot. The tall consists of a piece of ribbon with a gold bead suspended upon it. The knot it is that legally binds the wife to her husband, and makes the marriage indissoluble, for Brahmins do not recognise divorce.



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### NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**BOB.**—Addresses are never given.  
**MUMPS.**—There is no license required.  
**B. D. G.**—Sue through the county court.  
**T. F.**—The tenant is clearly liable for both.  
**OLD TOM.**—We doubt whether you have any claim.  
**MARK.**—He has only a life interest in the property.  
**U. A. G.**—The attestation might be called in question.  
**DART BELL.**—You had better inquire of some costumer.  
**NOVICE.**—Apply to Inland Revenue Office for a license.  
**ANXIOUS READER.**—Within twelve months from date of birth.  
**MILLIE.**—He is under no obligations to do so, unless he chooses.  
**PIDDELING.**—Carmelus is from the Italian, and means "my dear."  
**POPPER.**—Either from the district registrar or at Somerset House.  
**BRADIE.**—We should advise you to show it to a professional cleaner.  
**ISORAMOR.**—"Drogheda" is pronounced as if the "s" were silent.  
**P. W.**—You put yourself entirely in the wrong by withholding the rent.  
**WORRIED WIFE.**—You are protected by the Married Women's Property Act.  
**MINTA.**—Black would get to look rusty, but dark or navy blue is very nice.  
**WALKER.**—Consult a solicitor; much depends on the particular circumstances.  
**NAN.**—The white of an egg applied at once to a burn or scald gives prompt relief.  
**INONIA.**—It will assuredly not stand in the way of your appointment to Civil Service.  
**SHAKANAH.**—A servant cannot in any circumstances compel her mistress to give her a character.  
**A "LONDON READER" LOVER.**—It indicates that he comes of a hairy race, that and nothing more.  
**THEATRICAL.**—All dyes are injurious if used for any length of time. We do not recommend them.  
**YOUNG BROTHERS.**—Such acts of courtesy are pleasant and should be observed whenever it is possible.  
**M. S.**—It is much too small a sum on which to marry; wait until you are in a better pecuniary position.  
**STUPIDITY.**—It would be insulting to address the widow by any other than her late husband's name.  
**LEONARD.**—Registered letters are seldom lost; in fact there are few letters lost in the post of either description.  
**BROWNETTE.**—Fair hair and skin, with light blue or grey eyes, are usually found in calm-spirited, unemotional people.  
**LEO.**—The child must have attained the age of fourteen years and be in the seventh standard, unless in exceptional cases.  
**A. S.**—There are several methods; almost any elementary work on the pastime would give you the required information.  
**LITTLE HOUSEWIFE.**—Copper vessels may be effectively cleaned by rubbing them with half a lemon dipped in salt. They should then be rinsed in pure water, and afterward polished with a soft cloth.  
**SALLY.**—A trice is the sixtieth part of a second of time. The hour is divided into sixty minutes, the minute into sixty seconds, and the second into sixty trices, or thirds, from the Spanish *tercio*.

**ANNIE.**—You must state what kind of pastry you want to make; it is of no use to make a vague general request as you have put it.

**W. T.**—If you take the house at a weekly rental a week's notice is sufficient, although the rent may by agreement be paid at longer intervals.

**WOULD BE WAITRESS.**—You should go to a tablemaid who goes out to wait tables and get some lessons, or to an hotel and pay head waiter for lessons.

**NEAVOOR.**—Java is said to be the region of the globe where it thunders ofttest, having thunderstorms, on an average, ninety-seven days of the year.

**ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.**—A marriage by banns in any name, whether true or assumed, is legal, and the offspring of such marriage are legitimate.

**ORANGES BLOSSOMS.**—The strictly proper way would be to send both wedding and reception cards to all of the friends whom you desire to be present.

### HER GREAT-GREAT-GRANDMOTHER'S SHOES.

To think my great-great-grandmother  
 Ever had such little feet!  
 A pair of slippers big and broad—  
 Suggesting gait—more meet  
 Would seem to this diminutive  
 Chancesure of rose brocade,  
 The sight of which must set a-dance  
 The thoughts of the most staid.

To think my great-great-grandmother  
 Was ever young and gay!  
 She'd be so old—a hundred odd—  
 Were she alive to-day!  
 Like some majestic ghost in cap  
 And spectacles she's loomed  
 Up in my mind. But since I've seen  
 These shoes, that shade is doomed.

No longer shall I think of her  
 As one to be revered;  
 But, from to-day, her memory  
 To me must be endear'd,  
 Since now 'tis as a girl just like  
 My giddy self I choose  
 To think of her whose feet once danced  
 In those dear little shoes!

**LOVER OF FUN.**—We should think the dress would stand washing, if done very carefully, and not stretched, and was afterwards hung in the shade to dry.

**S. G.**—Meerschaum pipes are made of a special clay found chiefly in Moravia, the Crimea, and Turkey; small quantities are also got in Spain and Carolina.

**SCATTERLOUS.**—He must be moderate enough in his indulgence of either delight to prevent the liking for them from weakening his delight in higher things.

**BOSS.**—Never wash them in hot water. Make a good lather of soap, and when it has soiled down considerably, wash, rinse and dry them as quickly as you can.

**B. T. A.**—It should be placed in the water with the skin side up to freshen quickly; otherwise the salt lodges against the skin, and it takes longer to become fresh.

**GRACE.**—It is impossible to prevent the fur from coming off the cloak now that it has been moth'd; the texture is ruined, and there is no way of restoring it.

**REGULAR SUBSCRIBER.**—Trap them by laying in their runs hollow cans, or a little hay in inverted pots slightly tipped up on one side, and look for them in the traps, where they go to hide in the daytime. Kill all you find.

**R. Q.**—The Statute of Limitations only applies to debts six years old and upwards, upon which no interest has been paid, or instalment made on account, or fresh acknowledgment given, or writ issued for recovery within the six years.

**LUCEFER.**—Grate into some clean water some peeled raw potatoes sufficient to form a thin paste, then add some very finely powdered pumice-stone; apply with a sponge, thoroughly cleaning the whole. Finish by washing well with clean water and a fresh cloth. Give it a full day to dry, then varnish.

**LAURA.**—Catherine de Medici was the daughter of Lorenzo de Medici. She was born in Florence, 1519, and died in 1580. She was the wife of Henry II. of France, and mother of Francis II., Charles IX., and Henry III. During the minority of Charles she was queen regent. She precipitated the wars of the religious, and instigated the massacre of St. Bartholomew. She was a woman of great ability and force of character, but utterly immoral.

**WILFRED H.**—The freedom of the burgh is an empty honour; in old days until a man was made free of the burgh he could not open business or set up trade in it; those who possessed the right had their names entered on the roll of burghesses, and they were recognised as superior or leading citizens; the roll is retained, and when a man has the freedom conferred on him he is enrolled among the superior citizens, with right to be elected to the town council, if he likes to offer himself to the ratepayers.

**THURSDAY'S CHILD.**—There are several different versions of the rhyme you mention. Here is one:

"Monday's child is fair of face,  
 Tuesday's child is full of grace,  
 Wednesday's child is full of woe,  
 Thursday's child has far to go,  
 Friday's child is loving and giving,  
 Saturday's child must work for a living,  
 But the child that is born on the Sabbath-day  
 Is blithe and bonny and good and gay."

**CONSTANT SUBSCRIBER.**—Take two ounces of white curd soap, or of cold-cream soap, a quarter of an ounce of carbonate of potash, four fluid ounces of water and one drachm of carbonate of ammonia. Out the soap up fine and boil it gently in the water. Whom of a uniform paste, add the ammonia and the carbonate of potash, and stir the mass well together. Put it into a jar and use, when cold and set, as follows:—Rub the paste on the gloves (on the hand) with clean flannel, and as the dirt disappears use more clean flannel to brighten them. If the paste gets hard, add warm water.

**OLIVIA.**—The French at Waterloo had practically lost the day; Napoleon's force was disorganised and in process of falling to pieces before Blücher arrived, but till then Wellington could not make the general advance to deliver a decisive blow and rout the French; it should be understood, however, that Napoleon was aware of Blücher's advance, and detached a large division to intercept and defeat him; that movement was not successful beyond delaying the Prussian general's arrival on the ground; he should have joined forces with Wellington at four in the afternoon, but did not arrive till about seven; the French were then, as we say, a defeated force; it was the Prussians, however, who assisted in their rout, and pursued them in retreat.

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We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

## ALMOST INCREDIBLE—YET TRUE.

Is it incredible that an illness of fourteen years should be cured in two months? Some may say it is impossible. But *why* is it impossible? A fire that has been blazing and smouldering alternately for fifty years may be completely extinguished in an hour. The most thorough and permanent reforms that ever took place in human affairs have been *comparatively sharp and sudden*. I tell you that when the right forces get to work at certain kinds of evils, the element of time hardly enters into the calculation. In some parts of America, for instance, the tremendous change from winter to summer practically occurs in two or three weeks. Every statement in the annexed letter has been carefully verified, yet in the middle ages the result would have been attributed to no power less than a power able to work miracles:—

"In the summer of 1875," says the writer, "after my confinement, I took a cold chill and failed to get up my strength. Cold, clammy chills broke over me, and I felt too exhausted to stir hand or foot. I had a bad taste in the mouth and my tongue was coated with slimy matter. I had no appetite, and after every bit of food I ate I had pain at the chest and a sinking feeling at the pit of the stomach. My breathing was short and laboured, and I had to be propped up with pillows.

"My knees and feet were swollen, being puffed up like a bladder; and after a time they broke out. *For months I lay in bed unable to do anything*; and at other times I could barely walk about the house. I slept badly at night, and got little rest night or day.

"*For fourteen long years I continued in this low, miserable state*; sometimes feeling better, and then bad as ever; but all the time in pain. I saw doctor after doctor and took medicines of all kinds, but nothing did me any good.

"Often I was so bad I thought I should die, and was *attended by the doctors and clergy*. All my friends and neighbours believed I would never get better.

"In August, 1889, a book was sent to me by post, in which I read about Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup, and the good it had done many persons. The book described my own ailment, and I then resolved to give the remedy a trial.

I sent to Messrs. Gratton and Co., the chemists, at Belfast, for a supply; and, after taking it a short time, I felt it was doing me good. First I could eat well, and the food agreed with me; and my breathing was easier.

"On this I persevered with the medicine, and gradually but surely I grew stronger; and in *two months* was in good health, all the pain and depression having left me. I have since been well, keeping Mother Seigel's Syrup in the house as a family medicine; and it always maintains us in health. This remedy has saved my life. You are at liberty to publish my statement, and refer any inquiries to me. (Signed) Jane Usher, Aghadalgan, Glenlavy, near Lisburn, Ireland, August 17th, 1897."

This most remarkable case of cure is well known throughout the district in which it took place. The lady is the wife of Mr. Robert Usher, grocer and publican, and both are highly respected in the Aghadalgan district. Mrs. Usher states that since her wonderful restoration to health, the medicine which did the work is to be found in every house in the district, and in *every instance* it has benefited the persons with whom she has spoken. Both she and her husband tell their friends and customers of what it did for them.

Here we have a case of chronic dyspepsia, with profound complications, of fourteen years' standing, cured in *two months*. It seems amazing—it is amazing—yet it is every word true. Other medicines failed, for the simple reason that they were not the right ones for the disease. Mother Seigel's Syrup triumphed, as it were in a moment, because it *was* the right medicine. It had power over the disease, as water has over fire, or has sunlight and heat have over the darkness and damps of night. Beyond this point all is mystery. But what of that? Life itself is a mystery; and so are all things that concern and promote it. The practical fact is, that Mother Seigel's Syrup crushes out disease when other treatment is vain, and snatches from death thousands who, without it, would soon close their weary eyes in the sleep that knows no waking. That is why (like Mrs. Usher) they spread its fame wherever illness and pain cry out for succour.





# LONDON READER

## CHRISTMAS NUMBER

WITH NO. 1857.—VOL. LXXII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 3, 1898.

[PRICE TWOPENCE.]

### She Came and Went.

—100—

SHE came and went as comes and goes  
The dewdrop on the morning rose,  
Or as the tender lights that die  
At shut of day along the sky.  
Her coming made the dawn more bright,  
Her going brought the sombre night;  
Her coming made the blossoms shine,  
Her going made them droop and pine.  
Where'er her twinkling feet did pass,  
Beneath them greener grew the grass;  
The song-birds ruffled their small throats,  
To swell for her the blithest notes.  
But when she went the blushing day  
Sank into silence chill and gray,  
The dark its sable vane unfurled,  
And sudden night possessed the world.  
O fond desires that wake in vain!  
She ne'er will come to us again;  
And now like vanished perfume sweet,  
Her memory grows more vague and fleet.  
Yet we rejoice that morn by morn  
The sad old world seems less forlorn,  
Since once so bright a vision came  
To touch our lives with heavenly flame,  
And show to our bewildered eyes  
What beauty dwells in paradise.

### In the Bright Yuletide.

#### CHAPTER I.

I SUPPOSE in all the fair North Country there was no family more honoured and respected than the Carews of FitzCarew. Rumour asserted they came over with the Conqueror, and that one of their ancestors fought at Hastings. Rumour may have been mistaken in some of these details, but the fact remained; the name was known and revered through the breadth and length of Blankshire, and to be a Carew of FitzCarew was considered a higher honour than an earldom.

Alas! alas! trouble, which comes to so many, did not except this proud old house. A time of ill-luck began for the Carews. The reigning Squire, a boon companion of George IV., mortgaged his fair acres up to the hilt, and thinned the timber, which had never before listened to the woodman's axe; his son was a gambler, who brought further embarrassments on the old estate. And so it went on, one long series of misfortunes, until, at the beginning of the present decade, the grandeur of the old family had fallen so thoroughly that most of their lands had fallen into other hands, and the Squire had much ado to keep up an establishment worthy not his rank or position, but a gentleman.

Everything was scarce at FitzCarew, not only money, but furniture, dresses, and servants. One single male retainer now moved where ten or twelve had been wont to serve; a very few rooms sufficed for use, and the young daughter of the house, the very last of the FitzCarews, boasted no lady's maid, but herself arranged her glossy tresses and attended to the toilet which, in spite of her father's reverses, always had an air of grace and fashion.

Hubert Carew was not a popular man. He had offended Blankshire on its most sensitive points. He did not hunt, though his ancestors had been masters of the foxhounds for centuries; he neither shot nor fished, both of them sports dear to every real Blankshire heart; and, crowning offence of all, he did not marry in his own county, where there were plenty of well-to-do damsels who, in spite of his fallen fortunes, would gladly have been mistresses of FitzCarew, but chose to wed a foreigner—anyone born out of Blankshire, in local significance.

The smile of Heaven was not on this union, people said. Mrs. Carew was

penniless, and her husband's circumstances were such that a wealthy wife would have been a godsend to him. No one knew much about her, save that she came from Devonshire. Mr. Carew had taken her abroad directly after the wedding, and nothing more was heard of them till just one year after, unexpected and unwelcomed, there drove up a close carriage to FitzCarew, from which descended a decent motherly woman, evidently a nurse, with a long-robed baby in her arms, and Hubert Carew himself, a broad black band upon his hat.

That was all. The baby's life had cost her mother's, and Audrey Carew lay sleeping in a foreign grave. The Master (as he was called in north-country fashion) never mentioned his loss, never sought sympathy or consolation; he settled down among his own people, and devoted himself to his little daughter.

For eighteen years he lived thus, and each year found him poorer and more embarrassed. He did not dissipate money as his father and grandfather had done; he seemed to spend next to nothing, and yet his affairs got more and more hopelessly into confusion, till, on Joan's eighteenth birthday, ruin was very near.

The daughter of the Carews was a beautiful, high-bred damsel, with dark lustrous eyes, a face with bright southern colouring, and the thickest and silkiest of black hair. She was a Carew, every inch of her, the villagers said, and her father secretly regretted she bore no resemblance to her sweet, dead mother.

Not that he loved her less; it would have been impossible for any father to have cared more for his daughter than Hubert Carew cared for Joan. For her sake he bore his bitter burden, more bitter and heart-breaking than his neighbours ever guessed; for her sake he prayed for life, even when life had lost all its brightness.

Miss Carew had a liberal education; Miss Carew was never denied anything she desired. Whoever else went short, whatever else was done without, Joan had all she desired; and so, by degrees, the girl lost all belief in their difficulties. She knew, in a vague sort of way, they were not rich, that they could not keep up a state befitting their rank, but that a day might come when FitzCarew himself should belong to them no longer, when they were cast forth, lonely wanderers, into the wide world. She had no idea; she knew her father was often troubled and anxious, but she never guessed it was for her sake, that, dearly as he loved her, he would have seen her married thankfully just that he might be sure she had a protector when he was taken from her.

It was winter time, December was more than half-way through. The Master (we will use the Blankshire title for Hubert Carew) sat at breakfast with his child, the post had just come in, and he was reading his letters with a grave, thoughtful face.

"Papa, what time shall we go to Lady Aylmer's?" asked Joan, looking up from the omelette she was eating with such dainty grace.

Last year Miss Carew had "come out," and now she went to every party in Blankshire. True, the Master did not return his neighbours' festivities; that mattered nothing. His handsome, scholarly face and his child's beauty were welcome everywhere; the prestige of their race hung over the last members of the grand old family.

"I don't think I can go, Joan."

"Not go! Why, it was settled last week!"

Lady Aylmer was a new-comer in Blankshire, and she paid great court to the Carews. In common with the rest of the county, she ignored the total ruin that was impending. She knew, as did most people, that the Master was in difficulties; but, then, she knew he had been so for years and years, so that she looked on it as Joan did, as a chronic disorder that might be inconvenient, but was by no means alarming.

"Yes," said Hubert, slowly; "I know, birdie; but I have letters here that will keep me at home."

"Let me stay, too!" pleaded Joan.

"Nonsense! little one; go and be happy."

"I don't think I *shall* be happy without you. Aylmer Court is not the liveliest place in the world."

"I thought you liked Lady Aylmer?"

Joan looked steadily into the fire.

"I like her when I am with her; but——"

"But what, Joan?"

"I don't think she is sincere."

The Master had doubted that before now himself.

"I don't like the way she treats Miss Cheaney," went on Joan, dreamily. "She behaves just as though she were a servant; and Miss Cheaney can't help being poor."

"We would all help it if we could, I fancy."

Joan drew up her head.

"What do you mean, papa? We are not poor like that. We may not be rich, like Lady Aylmer; but we can't compare ourselves to Miss Cheaney. Why, she has only forty pounds a year, which Lady Aylmer pays her!"

The Master wondered, hopelessly, whether he could secure even such a pittance as that for his darling when he was dead. An awful fear came to him of Joan spending her bright youth in the servitude of some crotchety person like Lady Aylmer; but he pushed the picture resolutely aside.

"The child is sure to marry," he told himself.

"Won't you come, really, papa?" asked Joan, returning to the charge.

"Not to day, dear. To-morrow or Thursday I hope to reach the Court."

"But what shall I tell Lady Aylmer?"

"Say that someone is coming to see me on business. Make my regrets to her and Sir John."

"I hate people coming to see you on business," pouted Joan. "They make you so dull."

The Master sighed.

"I will promise to get cheerful before I present myself at the Court."

Evening had come, the gloom of night crept over FitzCarew. Its fair young mistress had departed, carrying with her much of the brightness of the grim old house. Hubert Carew was always a melancholy man, but certainly a double portion of care was always on his brow whenever fate separated him from his only child.

Dinner was at six to-night, and it was laid for two by the Master's orders; but instead of the bright, winsome face of Joan there sat at the end of the table a tall, thoughtful-looking man, whose eye was as keen, whose mind as clear, as though he had not long ago entered his sixth decade.

It was Marston St. John, nominal head of an old-established firm of solicitors, but who really had almost retired from public life, and only left his little paradise in Kent when the affairs of an old and valued client seemed to need his personal attention.

Such a client was Hubert Carew. Ever since Marston St. John's grandfather founded the firm they had managed the affairs of the Carews, and in justice to them we must observe that had that reckless family only followed their advice things would have gone very differently.

The two men sat opposite each other. They presented a striking contrast—the one successful beyond his dreams, prosperous, wealthy, the head of a family who bid fair to follow in his steps. With no trouble in life, save a slight tendency to the gout, his years sat lightly on the lawyer's brow; and a casual observer, in spite of the twenty years between them, might well have supposed him to be the younger of the two.

There was very little conversation during dinner, and that of the most trivial nature, but as soon as the cloth was removed Hubert Carew gave up his attempts at self-command; he buried his face in his hands and fairly groaned.

"It is quite true, I suppose!" he cried, desperately. "Can you see no way of escape?"

The lawyer looked into the fire, not to deliberate; he knew his answer too well for that, only to gain time.

"I am afraid not."

"Think of the centuries FitzCarew has been in the family. It will kill me to leave the old place, not that I wish to live. Heaven knows I have suffered too much for that. If Joan were but married I would go, only too gladly, to join her mother."

Mr. St. John sighed.

"I have feared this step for years; why Mr. Ford has not foreclosed before I can't imagine."

"He has been paid his interest regularly."

"Yes, but it is low interest for such a sum! Few men could afford to keep a hundred thousand pounds locked up all these years."

"He is a rich man."

"Enormously! I suppose he is one of the largest millowners in Yorkshire."

"A millowner Lord of FitzCarew! It is enough to make the Carews rise from their graves."

"Hardly that," corrected the lawyer, gently. "You know Sir John Aylmer, who is nothing in the world but a millowner's son!"

"And when does the man want possession?"

"He is in no unseemly haste; he offers to pay off the other creditors, and leave you a free man."

"I shall never be that."

There was such an utter despair in his voice, such blank, hopeless misery in his face, that St. John was touched.

"Mr. Carew," he said, with as much deference as though the ruined man had been a millionaire, "am I right in thinking it is not only this money trouble that distresses you?"

A little silence, then simply,—

"I am going to trust you with my miserable story," said Hubert, after a pause. "Shut the door, St. John, and turn down the lamp. I couldn't tell what I have to say in a bright light like this."

St. John coolly turned the key in the lock, and lowered the lamp to the faintest glimmer. All this he did in perfect silence; then he came back to his seat opposite the Master, and waited for him to speak.

"Do you remember Joan's mother?"

Not "Miss Carew," not "my wife"—he spoke of his lost love only as "Joan's mother!"

"Perfectly."

"The sweetest, gentlest creature Heaven ever made, and she was mine! She loved me as well as though I had given her the mines of Golconda."

"She was all that," admitted St. John. "She was one of the sweetest women I ever met; but do you think she would approve of your life-long grief? Do you think it would please her to see the aimless, useless existence you have led ever since?"

"You hit hard, St. John, but I deserve it."

"If I speak too freely forgive me; but—"

"But you don't know all. You saw Audrey; you know how I loved her, and you believe me mourning for her loss. I tell you I was never more thankful than when I closed my darling's eyes!"

St. John's first impression was that the Master must be mad, but there was nothing of insanity in Hubert's clear, dark eyes.

"I killed her!" went on the wretched man, brokenly. "I, who loved her better than life itself, planted the dagger in her heart which slew her!"

"You must be dreaming!"

"I wish I were. I can remember the whole scene as if it were but yesterday. We were abroad, returning slowly homewards, that the heir we so eagerly expected might be born in England. We were in Paris, expecting to cross in a day or two, when a message was brought that a lady wished to see me alone on urgent business. She sent a card inscribed with the name of my deceased wife."

Marston St. John started.

"Ah, you never heard of that madonna. It happened when I was at college, and she ten years my senior. I found her out for what she was in six months. We separated, I giving her half the allowance I received from my father. I don't suppose half-a-dozen people know of my mistake. Long before I met Audrey the new-came that I was free. Before I married my darling I had grown to look on that first wretched entanglement as an ugly dream."

Marston St. John listened with rapt attention. In his eagerness he drew his chair a trifle nearer to his client's. He noticed then that Hubert Carew's face was ashen white, and he trembled for the results of the interview upon his nervous, sensitive frame.

"The card was brought you with her name—do you mean the name that you had given her?"

"Just that—'Kate Carew.' I thought at first some of her relations had come to beg money of me, and brought the card as their introduction. The fearful truth never dawned upon me."

"And you went downstairs?"

"I did. We had a very pretty *salon*, divided in the middle by curtains of thick silk, which were usually drawn. I only mention this to explain the rest. I came down and entered the room abruptly; then every drop of blood in my veins seemed turned to ice. It was the woman whom the law called my wife."

"And you are certain! Sure it was no imposture?"

"I was too certain. She had a bold, daring face, handsome after a certain style; but there was one peculiarity about it no one could imitate. Her hair was blue-black, but in the front there was one long white tress. As my eye fell on the white lock hope died at my heart."

"It was really she?"

"It was. Mean, petty, vindictive revenge had made her spread abroad the report of her death, trusting to deceive me. She had been seeking us for months. She threw it in my teeth that Audrey was—I cannot put it into words—that the child we were hoping for could be no Carew."

"And what did you do?"

"I was beside myself. I tried threats, persuasions; I offered money. She was deaf to all. The utmost I could prevail was that she promised to keep the secret until the next day, when I was to call on her."

He paused, as though to take breath, drained a glass of water that stood near him, and then went on,—

"She went. I threw aside the curtain, meaning to go into the other room, and breathe the air that had not been polluted with her presence, but as I entered it I saw what almost broke my heart. Audrey was lying unconscious on the floor. One look at her face and I knew she had heard what I would have died to keep from her. It seemed to me then to matter little whether my secret was kept or not since it had reached the creature I best loved."

St. John took his hand and pressed it warmly. There were tears in the lawyer's eyes. He had listened to many strange stories, heard many mysterious confidences before, but never one which interested or saddened him more than this.

"There is little more to say," went on Hubert, wearily. "When morning dawned my Audrey had left me, and I had a little nameless child. People who knew how I had worshipped Audrey marvelled to see my dry eyes, my calm self-concern, and they little knew the burden heavy at my heart."

"And the other?"

"Who?"

"The woman the law would call Mrs. Carew."

Carew shuddered.

"I think even she felt guilty when she heard of her work. At that moment it seemed to me nothing mattered. I dared her to do her worst. Then she asked me if I would like Audrey's child to be branded as— I need not give you the details. We arranged that she was to keep the secret while I supplied her with money. She would not name any stated sum, so that I was at her mercy. In all these years I have never dared to refuse her demands, though I knew they were bringing me to ruin."

"But she must have spent thousands."

"Aye, and tens of thousands. Money flies fast when it can be had for the asking, and goes to supply the wants of a gamestress and a drunkard."

"Has she fallen as low as that?"



"She has fallen as low as it is possible, only I have no redress; my hands are tied."

"You must have suffered."

"Suffered! Aye, my days have been one long anguish; my life one living agony."

"It has told on you."

"Aye, I am full twenty years younger than you, and yet I look your senior. I never could have borne it but for Joan."

"And she knows nothing?"

"Nothing in the world. I don't think she has any idea even how great are my difficulties. I did just give her a hint to-day that it would be a relief to me when I saw her safe in a good man's keeping."

"A relief?"

"Unspeakable."

"But everything must be revealed then."

"Any man who woos must do so for herself alone, since everyone knows she is penniless; anyone who loved her would not forsake her for the cruel misfortune which is in no part her fault."

It was the irony of fate that a few days afterwards Herbert Carew's wife died, and was verified this time beyond a doubt.

## CHAPTER II.

MR. FORD and the late Sir John Aylmer had once been close friends; both were rich men, both had made their wealth, but yet there was a great difference between them. Aylmer began life as a mill-hand at a few shillings a week; James Ford was the son of a manager, received an excellent education, and succeeded to his father's post. He never knew the drudgery, the rough companions, the coarse associations, which perforce were Aylmer's lot.

James Aylmer got on, overtook his friend in the race for wealth, and for a time seemed to surpass him; seemed, that is, because Aylmer's one aim was to appear rich, and make people pay court to him for his wealth, while Mr. Ford hated all display and ostentation. One stuck to the old business, the other sold his share as soon as it would realise his expectations; one set up for a fine gentleman, went into Parliament, and tried to force himself into the best society; the other went on in his native place, respected and esteemed by those who knew him as a pleasant neighbour and scholarly man, and yet never guessed the almost fabulous wealth the mill brought him year by year.

His wife died young, so there was no feminine influence to induce him to make a dash, such as had been brought to bear on Sir John Aylmer. He never replaced her, but devoted himself heart and soul to her two children, loving them as tenderly, bringing them up as carefully as though they had been his own, instead—as was the case—of forming the only dowry Rosalie Fairfax brought him when he married her, a penniless widow years before our story.

"Ken, I have an invitation for you."

The two were sitting at breakfast on the very December morning on which Joan Carew started to visit Lady Aylmer.

Aline, a pretty, fairy-like girl of seventeen, who was pouring out the coffee, looked up all expectation; Kenneth, eight or nine years her senior, smiled back an inquiry on his stepfather.

Not that the word stepfather was ever known in that house. Aline had come there a baby in arms, and remembered no other home; Kenneth was old enough to know that his mother had owed all her happiness to her second husband, and that, if his own father's family were allied to the peerage, they yet had shown scant kindness to the widow and orphan.

"Do you remember Lady Aylmer?"

Ken shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sure I thought she had forgotten our existence by this time. I remember her perfectly; a fidgety little lady, who was always scolding you for not living up to your position."

Mr. Ford smiled.

"I fancy she lives a little too much up to hers. Her husband left a fine property, but her son knows no more how to manage it than a baby; besides, he's very wild. She seems anxious that he should marry."

"Pleasant for his wife."

"Well, he'd settle down then."

"Is that why you're so anxious to provide me with a better-half?" inquired Ken Fairfax, quietly. "Has it occurred to you that I am dreadfully wild, dad?"

"It has occurred to me," said Mr. Ford, smiling again, "that if my wish is ever to be gratified—"

"Which it never will be," put in a mischievous voice in an audible whisper.

"You ought to see more of the world," continued Mr. Ford, rather as if he felt he had made a suggestion which would be hopelessly crushed.

"And so you have persuaded her ladyship to invite me to Aylmer Court?" said his son, good-naturedly. "Talk about manœuvring mothers, sir, none of them ever came up to you in iniquity."

"But you will go, Ken?" urged his father, persuasively.

"I'd much rather not."

"I really wish you would. I don't like Lady Aylmer, but I can't forget that her husband and I were close friends."

Ken shrugged his shoulders.

"I wonder her ladyship condescends to remember our existence. I thought she hated trade and all connected with it."

"She seems really anxious for you to go. One thing sounds absurd, she has actually forgotten your proper name."

"I doubt if ever she heard it. I was small enough to be 'Master Kenneth' without any second name at all in the days when we visited her."

"I had better undeceive her."

"By no means," returned Kenneth, quietly. "She'd probably look on me as an impostor. I feel quite capable of bearing another title for a little while. It won't be for long. A week will be the utmost I can spend at the Court."

Aline had left the room.

A grave look settled on the millowner's face. It did not escape Kenneth's observation.

"Is there anything the matter, sir?"

"Nothing."

"You seem troubled."

"I am just a little perplexed."

Fairfax looked anxiously at his stepfather.

"Is it about Lady Aylmer? Of course I'll make myself agreeable to her if you lay such a stress upon it and I can accomplish it. I am not in the least a lady's man, you know."

"I wish you were."

Kenneth smiled.

"If I were the heir to a dukedom which stood in imminent risk of becoming extinct you couldn't bother yourself more over my single state."

"I never knew happiness until I met your mother. Surely you are old enough to remember her tenderness and goodness?"

A mist came before Kenneth's eyes.

"She was like Aline, only she had known trouble," he said, slowly. "I can't explain my distaste for womankind, sir. I loved my mother tenderly. I am very fond of Aline; but the bulk of their set, the idle, giddy butterflies one meets in society, I look upon as nothing but pretty, dressed-up dolls, without heart or feeling."

"It isn't natural, Kenneth, to feel so unless—"

"Unless?"

"Unless you have had a disappointment. Is that it, my boy? Do you dislike women at large because you have liked one too well? Don't mind the question, Ken. I tell you frankly that with your own gifts and the wealth that may be yours some day there is no young lady in England to whose hand you might not aspire."

Fairfax shook his head.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, sir; but I never yet saw a face I should care to look at day after day. As to money, you have done too much for me already."

"You are my heir, Kenneth. The child, of course, must be provided for, but the bulk of my property must be yours."

"I don't want it, sir. I hope you'll live many a year to enjoy it."

Mr. Ford sighed. He looked so disappointed that Kenneth's heart was touched.

"Don't worry over it, sir."

"I must!"

"You said just now you were perplexed," said Fairfax, anxious to change the subject. "Won't you tell me what about?"

The old man passed one hand thoughtfully across his brow.

"Have you any knowledge of Blankshire, Kenneth?"

Kenneth shook his head.

"It's about a hundred miles off, sir, and I believe it's a fine hunting country. I think that's the extent of my information."

"You know that Aylmer Court is in Blankshire."

"I didn't. You see," said Ken, apologetically, "I never studied that book on 'Landed Gentry.'"

"Ah! Have you never wondered what I did with all my money?"

"Not exactly. I am not like Lady Aylmer."

"I have been busy making investments, Kenneth. For years I have had one object in view."

"And you have failed," suggested the young man, gently. "You are trying to tell me your speculations have turned out badly, and we must begin the world again. Well, I am young and strong, and the child does not care for luxuries. So that Aline has her books and flowers she will be content."

"Wrong again, my boy! My investments have succeeded admirably. The fairest estate in Blankshire will be ours in a few months."

He told the story of Carew's ruin without any tinge of triumph. Kenneth could see he was full of pity for his creditor.

"Now that it has come to the point, you see, though it is my own money, honestly earned, I don't like taking the place. I can't bear to think of the Master of FitzCarew turned out from his ancestral home as a beggar."

"He deserves it. I never pity a spendthrift."

"Still one pities his family."

"Is Mr. Carew married?"

"I believe so."

"I don't see what's to be done, sir. If you forego your claim for his life it would come just as hardly on his son. You can't stand out of your rights for ever."

"No."

"Depend upon it, it will be best for them to get the wretch over as soon as may be. It must be like living with a drawn sword over their heads."

"Then you would let things take their course?"

"I don't see any help for it."

"Yes; only I thought, Kenneth, while you live in Blankshire you might make Mr. Carew's acquaintance."

"I shouldn't fancy he'd care about mine."

"Nonsense! You could invent some excuse for calling on him, and you might tell him if he has any banking for the old place I'd never turn him out of it while he lived. I meant FitzCarew as a wedding present for you, Kenneth, but as there seems no chance of—"

"No chance of my requiring one you'll let Mr. Carew stay there for the rest of his natural life. Couldn't you intimate that to his lawyers?"

"I'd rather it went to him direct from you."

"I don't relish the errand."

"I can't bear to think of him being hunted out from his birthplace. I can trust you, Kenneth. Though you jest about it, you would be the last to trample on a man that's down."

"I hope so."

"Then I shall write to Lady Aylmer, and tell her you will be with her the day after to-morrow. I hope you will stay over Christmas, Kenneth."

"You inhospitable man! As much as to insinuate you don't wish for my company on Christmas Day!"

"Well, you might be better employed. Truth to say, I have been a little selfish, Kenneth. Your sister was included in the invitation, but I kept that part of Lady Aylmer's letter to myself."

"Aline would suit the people at the Court much better than I shall."

"She might suit them too well."

"I see; you are afraid she might induce Sir John to consider his mother's wishes."

"Something of the kind."

"And wouldn't an alliance with a baronet gratify your paternal pride?"

"I love your sister as though she were my own child, Kenneth."

"I know you do."

"But I would rather see her lying in her coffin than decked in orange blossoms for John Aylmer. He is a bad man."

"I never heard much against him."

"His mother has held the reins too tightly. To outward eyes he is a model young man, but if he ever marries his wife's heart will ache some day."

"How did you find it out?"

"Never mind. I give you the hint. Don't bring him here."

"I shall seem very inhospitable; but, then, I forgot; Sir John Aylmer is far too great a man to visit simple tradespeople. I don't half like the idea of this visit."

"I dare say you will enjoy it, Kenneth. I depend upon you to act courteously in all things to Herbert Carew."

"I'll see to it;" and with this careless promise the stepfather had to be content.

### CHAPTER III.

THE drawing-room at Aylmer Court in the glow of the winter firelight, the soft rays of a lamp shed their radiance on the tasteful room, and ladies in all possible varieties of tengowns sat about holding cups of that refreshing beverage supposed to be dear to the hearts of the gentle sex. Besides the hostess and one or two matrons half-a-dozen damsels were present, and nearly every one had an attendant cavalier. The dainty silver and china sparkled on a gipsy table near her ladyship, and her keen eyes wandered with a well-pleased air to a low settee near the fire, on which sat Joan Carew, while near her, holding her tea-cup, stood the straight set figure of Sir John Aylmer.

Joan was looking her best to-night. She wore a loose robe of some costly Indian fabric, embroidered with all the skill of Eastern art, and confined at the waist by a silk girdle. The robe and girdle had both been found by our heroine in an old caken chest in the lumber-room. Both had, doubtless, been the property of some old forgotten ancestress; but they could never have suited her better than they did their present possessor.

"Mr. Ford."

At the sound of the footman's announcement Lady Aylmer sprang up to welcome the new arrival. There was just a shade of patronage in her voice. She had pressed Mr. Ford very warmly for a visit from his son; but she wished that son fully to understand she did not consider him quite "of her world." The patronage was thrown away, however. Kenneth responded with a dignity specially his own, and my lady felt instinctively that this tall, broad-shouldered young giant was a person of strong will and resolute mind. She inquired for his father and sister, presented him to Sir John, and then feeling she had done all the hospitality required of her, retired to her gipsy table.

Joan Carew looked a little inquiringly at Sir John, while his mother was making herself agreeable to the new-comer.

"A fancy of my mother," said the Baronet, grimly. "I can't think what she wants with the fellow."

Joan was puzzled at the tone.

"Do you mean you don't want him?"

"I think it a pity to revive old acquaintances that—were made years ago—under other circumstances."

"Is there anything queer about him?" and Joan touched her beautiful forehead significantly—"a little wrong here?"

"Oh, dear, no! My father was very kind to his good many years ago," reversing the facts rather cleverly, "and my mother has never lost sight of the family from sentimental recollection of her husband. I dare say they're respectable people enough."

A very pretty little blonde was entrusted to Kenneth's care to take into dinner—a laughing, saucy-tempered girl—as utter a contrast to Joan Carew as fate could have imagined.

"You're a stranger?" said Blanche Child to him, as they took their place. "I'm quite sure of it, by the way you look about."

"I hope I don't stare very much."

"No, you only look as if you were taking us all in. Now I have lived here for years, and I am quite prepared to be a walking dictionary of useful information for you."

"Do you mean it?"

"Certainly; first, though, tell me, have you any friends or relations here, for I should not like to offend you by criticising them?"

"I don't know a creature in the room except Lady Aylmer and her son."

"And you don't like them?"

"What makes you think that?"

"I know it. Well, I don't like them, either, so I'll keep counsel."

"If you don't like them, why are you here?"

"Because I possess a dear old father, who is fond of being at peace with all the world, and because, unluckily for me, Lady Aylmer thinks I can sing."

"Ah!"

"Now, why are you here?"

"The same reason as yourself."

"Meaning you also are supposed to sing?"

"No. I also have a father."

"Ah! Is he here?"

Blanche smiled and continued.

"Lady Aylmer has not been here many years. She used to hate me."

"I'm sure she couldn't!"

"Oh, yes she did. She suffered under a constant fear that Sir John should be wicked enough to like me."

"And hasn't he?"

"The temptation was removed, mercifully for him. He provided a substitute to suffer in his stead."

Kenneth looked at the third finger of her left hand.

"Not yet," said the young lady, laughing; "his martyrdom has not yet been accomplished. We are both as poor as church mice, and so—"

"You are waiting?"

"Precisely so."

"Is he—the martyr—here?"

"He is somewhere on the Pacific Ocean. Fate made him a sailor, and though he means to retire and settle down at the very earliest opportunity, it hasn't arrived yet; meanwhile Lady Aylmer is happy about her son, and very polite to me."

"But she can't keep him shut up in a glass case to protect him from young ladies!"

"She has selected one young lady who is to save him from the wiles of her fellows."

"Do you mean Miss Carew?"

"You said you knew no one here?"

"No one; but I saw those two together, and—"

"And guessed. Well, I never thought they looked like lovers."

"Are they lovers?"

"I don't know. Lady Aylmer would like it; Miss Carew approves of it. I fancy it will be."

"Is she an heiress?"

"Only to very encumbered property, but then that property is the oldest in the county."

"And Sir John is wealthy; so—"

"So it would be a fair bargain?"

"Yes, only—"

"Only?"

Blanche hesitated.

"I don't know Miss Carew well—no one does. She cares for no one in the world but her father. Still, she seems to me worthy of something better."

"Better than Sir John?"

"Better than being married, because her name is the oldest in the county. She always seems to me like someone with a sleeping soul."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't you admire her?"

"Shall I tell you my opinion after ten minutes' conversation with her?"

"Yes."

"I thought her simply the most disagreeable girl I had ever met."

There was a lull in the conversation at that moment, and the words fell full and clear on Joan's ear. She could not doubt that they applied to herself. She did not care in the least what Mr. Ford thought of her. The opinion of a tradesman, as she had been told he was, could be no manner of concern to her; and yet, as she heard his verdict, this retort rushed swiftly across her mind,—

"I hate him! He has no business to express an opinion about me. I should like to be revenged on him!"

Perhaps she had her wish, reader; for it is certain that the keenest pain, the sharpest disappointment of Kenneth's life, came to him through Joan Carew.

### CHAPTER IV.

THE days passed on to outward eyes pleasantly enough. The guests at Aylmer Court seemed thoroughly to enjoy the many amusements provided for them. Kenneth Fairfax threw off the gravity which had at first distinguished him, and appeared the gayest of the gay. He and Miss Child formed a friendly alliance, and spent much of their leisure together. They never



firted; there was nothing in their intercourse the absent lover himself could have objected to. Simply, Ken liked the little lady because she was so bright and genuine, while Blanche was pleased to find a man who amused her, and yet never strove to pay her compliments.

"Don't you feel curious to know how it will end?" she asked him, one clear winter's day, when a party of skaters were disporting themselves on the ice.

"I have yet to learn what 'it' is," he returns, quietly.

He knew perfectly well what she meant, for her eyes, brimful of mischief, are resting on the figures of Joan Carew and Sir John Aylmer, who were skating at a little distance; but somehow Kenneth would not understand the glance. Miss Carew had slighted him, and snubbed him, as no woman had ever done before. She had shown him openly she considered him unworthy to visit at Aylmer Court; and yet, such is the perversity of men, Kenneth had given more thought to her than he cared to own, even to himself, and he could not bear to think of her as condemned to drag out her life at John Aylmer's side.

"It is pretty, indeed!" smiled Miss Child. "He admires her, and she gives him every encouragement. I should say it would be publicly announced as soon as Mr. Carew arrives."

"Is he expected?"

"To-morrow."

"Is he like his daughter?"

"Yes and no. Joan is a true Carew; but her father has the kindest, saddest face in the world. He looks as if he would not hurt a human creature."

"Not like Miss Carew?"

Blanche looked at him, then spoke impulsively.

"Why does she hate you so?"

"Does she hate me?"

"I think so. The very sound of her voice seems to change when she speaks to you. Have you offended her?"

"Not excepting by being here at all. I fancy Miss Carew thinks me unworthy the honour of being Lady Aylmer's guest."

"She is terribly proud. Well, poor girl; I don't know that her worst enemy would wish her a harder fate than the one she is choosing."

Kenneth hesitated.

"She is so beautiful," he said, slowly. "Surely no man could be hard on her!"

"John Aylmer is hard on everything. He will regard Joan as bought with his money, just as much his goods and chattel as his horse or dog."

They were interrupted; there was the noise of a splash—a sudden cracking of the ice—and then the lake became one wild scene of cries and lamentations. Joan had ventured on an unsafe portion of the lake, the ice had broken, and now her fair form lay at the mercy of those cold, cruel waters.

Everyone expected Sir John to go to the rescue, but Sir John stood motionless. He talked of sending to the house for drags and men; but he never thought of risking his own life to save the girl whom everyone regarded as his fiancée.

"It will be too late," said Blanche Child, terribly. "We are miles away from any house—help would come too late."

While she had been speaking, while Sir John still stood irresolute, Kenneth had thrown off his coat; before anyone could speak he had flung himself into the stream. There was a pause of breathless excitement; he was a brave swimmer, but the current was fast and swollen. Already Joan had risen twice, the next time must be the last. There was no whisper, no word; everyone gazed in one intense anxiety to see the issue. It seemed to them hours, instead of minutes, before Kenneth laid the dripping form on the bank—white—still motionless.

Blanche alone had presence of mind. It was she who remembered a tiny cottage nest many yards from the park. She who insisted that Joan and her rescuer should both be taken there; finally, she who hung over the bed when the heiress of FitzCarew was stretched unconscious.

A doctor was soon in attendance, restoratives were administered; in a little while the dark eyes slowly opened, and Joan looked anxiously round the room.

"What has happened?"

Blanche bent over her.

"You fell into the water. Don't you remember the ice broke?—but you will be better soon."

Still that troubled gaze.

"You might have been drowned," went on Blanche, gently; "but you are quite safe now; the doctor says so."

"Who saved me?"

Blanche was conveniently deaf.

"Someone must have pulled me out of the water—someone must have risked his life for mine!"

"Yes!"

"Who was it?"

"I think you would rather not know."

"Nonsense!" and the pale face flushed. "But I can guess—it was Sir John!"

"No!"

"He was nearest to me!"

"Perhaps he cannot swim."

"Who was it then?"

"Mr. Ford."

A shadow of annoyance crossed Joan's face; it angered pretty, affectionate Blanche even to see it.

"Would you rather have died than owe your safety to him?" she asked,

sharply. "He saved your life at the risk of his own! Surely you can forgive him for not being one of your aristocratic friends?"

"I don't like owing my life to a common person like that."

"I fancy few common people have hearts and courage noble enough to risk their lives for a perfect stranger."

"Of course papa will thank him. I dare say we shall ask him to dinner."

I suppose he would be above any other mark of gratitude?"

"I think you are beside yourself."

It was Joan's turn to look surprised now.

"Why?"

"Because you speak of Mr. Ford as though he were beneath you."

"He is beneath us. He is only here on sufferance, because Lady Aylmer knew his mother a great many years ago; they are quite common people."

"Who told you so?"

"Sir John."

"Oh!"

"And to do the man justice he does not attempt to deny it. He told me himself he worked hard in his father's interest."

"I honour him for it."

"I suppose he stands behind the counter in a black apron. I fancy they are ironmongers. Now, Miss Child, would you like to own your life to a shopkeeper's assistant?"

"I think if my life were in danger I should be too grateful to whoever saved it to consider his position."

Joan looked astonished.

"I suppose you think me too proud?"

"I think you deny yourself much happiness by your exclusiveness."

Joan blushed.

"I can't forget that I am a Carew of FitzCarew, the very last of the good old line."

Blanche looked grave.

"It would have been better for you if you had had a brother."

"Would it? I have my father, I want no one else."

"Not even Sir John Aylmer?"

Joan blushed.

"Who told you?"

"Is there anything to tell? I couldn't help seeing he wished to secure Miss Carew as mistress of Aylmer Court."

Joan put her little cool, thin hand into Miss Child's, and said, wistfully,—

"You are engaged, aren't you?"

"Yes; but we shall not be married for ages—we are just as poor as two church mice."

"I never knew any girl who was engaged; will you tell me one thing?"

"Willingly."

"Does it make you happy?"

Blanche laughed.

"Of course it does."

"And yet you don't see him often?"

The other girl's face and voice softened indescribably, as she said,—

"But I know there is some one in the world to whom I am best and dearest. I know there is some one whom I love well enough to give up home, friends, even my dear old father, for his sake, and it makes me happy. I can't tell when it will be. I have no money, and Bertie is so poor, only I can trust him. I know his love can never fail me, and so I am well content to wait."

There were tears in Joan's eyes as she listened.

"I don't feel like that."

"I don't think two people ever do feel quite alike. If you love Sir John—"

"But I don't feel sure I love him!"

"You must know!"

"I don't! He is very pleasant and agreeable. I think he is very fond of me; and he has promised not to take me away from dad."

The last word told all. Blanche Child knew the tender spot of Joan's heart. She never spoke of her as cold or unfeeling again.

"Dear," and she put one arm lovingly round the neck of the orphan heiress, "you have no mother to help you, no sister. May I just say something?"

"Yes."

"Don't be in a hurry, wait and try to know your own mind; keep Sir John a few days in suspense, rather than give him a promise which may cost you all too dear."

They were interrupted. Lady Aylmer's carriage had come for Miss Carew. Sir John was in it.

"Come with us," said Joan, in a tone of entreaty.

Blanche could not refuse. She knew her presence would be regarded as a nuisance by the Baronet, but she never hesitated. She took her place in the brougham at Miss Carew's side.

Sir John had little opportunity for conversation with Joan. She leant her head wearily back in one corner of the carriage, and seemed to sleep.

Very few words were spoken until they reached the entrance to the Court. Lady Aylmer herself stood on the steps, waiting to receive them. By the very way in which she put her arms round Miss Carew, by the silken tone of her voice, as she addressed her, Miss Child knew that she believed she was addressing her future daughter.

"Poor child!" thought Blanche, as she walked off to her own room; "she has a heart hidden away somewhere behind that icy covering of pride and reserve! She will find it out some day, and love some one, but that

some one will never be Sir John Aylmer! If she marries him, it will be the shipwreck of her happiness.

### CHAPTER V.

KENNETH FAIRFAX, or, to give him the name by which alone he was known at Aylmer Court, Mr. Ford, went straight to his own room, changed his dripping garments, drank the hot brandy-and-water brought to him by Sir John's own valet; and then drawing up an easy chair close to the blazing fire, he threw himself wearily into it, and sat down to think.

His could hardly have been pleasant thoughts, although he had that day saved a human life. There was nothing of exaltation, or even of gladness, on his face; instead, a deep shadow rested on his brow, and his fine, strong mouth twitched, as though in pain.

"I am a fool!" he muttered, angrily; "a miserable fool! to waste a thought upon her! She looks on me as something beneath her very scorn; she would believe no warning that came from me. I suppose I must let it go on, and see her marry him, even though I have the certainty he will break her heart. I have half a mind to cut the whole concern, and go home."

He pushed one hand rapidly across his aching brow. How he longed for home, for the quiet, peaceful calm which reigned at his stepfather's house, no tongue could tell. The very thought of going there brought relief to his fevered brain, and yet he drove the thought away.

"It would be cowardly!" he muttered; "cowardly to run away from sorrow, and after all the mischief is done now! Her face would haunt me even if I never saw it again. How could I go home and face the dear old dad's questions, and own to him that I had left his request unfulfilled, and not even seen the Master of FitzCarew, just because I had seen too much of his daughter!"

His musings were interrupted. The door opened abruptly, and Sir John Aylmer entered. The Baronet, to do him justice, had never joined in the slight Mrs. Carew delighted in heaping on his guest; he had shown himself, when they were alone, especially friendly towards Kenneth—almost too much so, indeed, for the latter's comfort there. Sir John was one of the fastest men about town, and to hear of his devotion to ballet-dancers and netresses was hardly soothing to the man, who, to his own misery, had learnt to hold Joan Carew all too dear.

"Of course, you know what I have come for Ford?" began the Baronet, cordially. "You have saved my future wife's life, and, I assure you, I shall be grateful to you till my dying day! I can't swim a bit! It's terrible to think what might have happened to Joan had you not been there!"

"Joan, my future wife!" The words told their own story.

Kenneth nerved himself by an effort.

"You have nothing to be grateful for!"

"Nothing! My dear fellow, I assure you I don't count the future Lady Aylmer's life as nothing."

"Anyone in my place would have done as much."

Sir John smiled.

"I don't think so. Miss Carew is woefully proud, and I fancy she has given you little cause to think kindly of her."

Kenneth turned the subject adroitly.

"I did not know your engagement was an accomplished fact!"

Sir John looked aghast.

"We settled it last night, subject, of course, to the Master's consent; but I don't think he is likely to refuse it."

An irresistible desire assailed Kenneth to know whether Sir John had any idea of his prospective father-in-law's real circumstances.

"Will such an alliance satisfy your mother?"

"Thoroughly. Of course, there are heavy mortgages on FitzCarew! I shouldn't wonder if it took twenty thousand pounds to clear them; but, then, think of the position! Carew can't live many years—he looks now like a man with one foot in the grave—then I shall be lord of one of the oldest estates in England."

"Miss Carew is very beautiful!"

The words escaped him almost in spite of himself.

Sir John was not at all offended. He regarded them as a compliment to his own taste.

"Isn't she!—so thoroughbred! I expect she will be the finest thing out next season."

He spoke of Joan with almost as much enthusiasm as if she had been a horse.

"And you'll settle down into quite a domestic man!"

Sir John laughed a little uncomfortably.

"Oh, we shall not go in for that sort of thing," he said, carelessly.

"Joan is a sensible girl. She won't expect any nonsense. She will be Lady Aylmer. I shall give her a handsome allowance for dress and pocket-money. She will soon understand not to ask inquisitive questions."

Kenneth turned away with something very like a groan. It was quite lost upon Sir John. The Baronet never saw anything that was not very plain.

Mr. Ford was downstairs very early that evening. The drawing-room was empty when he entered it. He stood on the hearthrug, his eyes fixed upon the glowing embers, his thoughts busy with the chain of circumstances that had brought him to Blankshire. So absorbed was he that he did not hear the soft rustle of a silken train, and looking up suddenly he saw Joan Carew standing at his side.

A little paler than usual from her accident, a little grave and more serious than her wont, her eyes and smile a little softened, she looked to the man

who loved her more beautiful than he had ever seen her. Involuntarily he started.

"Miss Carew!"

"I wanted to thank you," she spoke, with a perceptible effort. "They tell me you saved my life."

"There is no cause for thanks."

His manner nettled her.

"Perhaps you think my life so valueless it is worthy of no gratitude."

"I think," he said, gravely, "your life is what you make it—you hold your fate in your own hands."

"I suppose we all do," she said, haughtily. "Then, Mr. Ford, you decline my thanks?"

"Nay, I accept them, because I am conscious how bitter a thing it is to you to offer them."

"Bitter?"

"Do you think I am quite blind?" he asked, slowly. "I know quite well you would rather have owed your life to anyone in this house than to myself."

She could not deny it, so, womanlike, she let the remark pass.

"My father will be here to-morrow—he will know better how to thank you."

"I shall be glad to make Mr. Carew's acquaintance."

"And the Master has great influence," said Joan, proudly, "though he lives so quietly he knows many powerful people, and I am sure he would do anything for the man who saved his daughter's life."

"I don't understand," said Mr. Ford, coldly.

"I mean," said Joan, impatiently, "if you are ambitious, and feel you are above your present position, my father would use his influence for you. He might get you a clerkship or—"

"Thank you, but I am quite content."

"Content!"

"Aye, I am a plain man, Miss Carew, and a business life suits me."

There was no time for another word—the other guests were entering. It was noticeable that evening that Miss Carew was the gayest of the gay. She laughed, she talked, she was the life of the whole party; and Sir John Aylmer, who hung over her chair with love-like devotion, felt well satisfied with his fiancée. Already he saw himself sought after and coveted as the husband of the loveliest woman in London.

It struck Mr. Ford as a little odd no engagement was proclaimed, but he imagined the Aylmers thought it best to await the coming of Mr. Carew. He wondered not a little what manner of man was the father of the proud heiress, and he felt not a little curious to meet him.

He had not long to wait. The next afternoon he heard the buzz of welcome, and going downstairs he saw Joan clinging to the arm of a sad, earnest-looking gentleman, whom instinct told him was her father.

"Miss Carew," he said, gently, "will you present me to the Master?"

Joan had no alternative.

"Papa, this is the person who saved my life."

Hubert Carew's hand was ready, his voice was half-broken with emotion. Instead of thanks in set, formal words he only murmured,—

"Heaven bless you, sir! You have saved me all that made my life worth the living for."

The tears stood in his eyes as he wrung the young man's hand. From that moment Kenneth liked and respected Hubert Carew.

"You did not tell me your friend's name, Joan," said her father, suddenly.

"You must let me know to whom my gratitude is due."

He looked at Kenneth, but our hero was incapable of words. To claim the name of Fairfax would be to bring on himself numberless questions, and he could not answer "Kenneth Ford." He knew full well what a bitter sound that word must have in the Master's ears.

"Is it a secret?" asked Hubert, pleasantly. "Joan, my dear, finish your introduction. I can't go about addressing this gentleman as 'my daughter's preserver.'"

"His name is Ford," said Joan, almost sullenly, and then she walked off, her head very erect, her step very dignified.

Hubert turned to Kenneth—there was no pretence, no false pride about him.

"I think I can understand. You are the son of Mr. Ford, of Briarleigh, and you have come here to see the estate as soon to be your home."

"You are mistaken," said Kenneth, shortly. "I am here at Lady Aylmer's invitation."

"But you are the new master of FitzCarew?"

Kenneth shook his head.

"My father will be that. I have lingered here, at his desire, to make your acquaintance, Mr. Carew, and to assure you, in his name, of our sympathy."

Carew sighed.

"Your father has been a generous creditor."

"He wishes to be. I have been charged to ask you if it would be any convenience to you to keep FitzCarew for your life—to assure you of our reluctance to see you leave the old home of your race."

The Master's answer was prompt.

"It is a kindly offer."

"And you accept it?"

"I refuse."

"Perhaps you are like your daughter—you refuse any service from a person in trade! I fancy Miss Carew would rather have lost her life than owed it to a shopkeeper's assistant."

"I don't understand."

"That is her name for me. I believe she thinks I stand perpetually behind a counter equipped in a black linen apron."



Carew's face flushed.

"She is inordinately proud, it is her only fault. You will forgive her?"

"Willingly; and you will think of my father's proposal?"

"I dare not."

"You will not."

"I dare not. Mr. Ford, I like you; there is something in your manner inspires my trust. I will treat you as a friend. I dare not accept your offer because my days are numbered."

"Numbered!"

"Aye. I carry about me the seeds of a fell disease; there is no knowing when the blow may fall."

"All the more reason for not deserting your old home."

"Nay; think of Joan."

"Miss Carew will be Lady Aylmer."

"I hope so."

"Then—"

"I must be frank with her husband. No man shall have power to say I deceived him. Whoever marries Joan shall know the exact truth, that she is the penniless child of an exiled man; her beauty is her only dowry."

Kenneth felt moved by the other's candour.

"With such a face as hers I don't expect money will make any difference. Mr. Carew, will you do me a favour?"

"If it is in my power."

"Do not tell your daughter of our business relations. Miss Carew would feel the loss of her home more bitterly if she guessed I was ever to be its owner."

"Have you quarrelled with Joan?"

"We have hardly exchanged a dozen words."

"She is generally so warm-hearted."

"Not to her inferiors; but I must not judge her hastily. She meant to be kind to me; she even promised me your influence to obtain a clerkship if I had the ambition to rise above my present position."

"A clerkship!"

"She thinks all business means shops. She has no idea of the real state of affairs."

"That your father is the richest man in Briarleigh, and your wife the most influential woman in the county."

"I have no wife."

"I beg your pardon. My thoughts must be confused, I am sure. I fancied your father meant the old pines for you as a wedding present."

"I fancy he does," and Kenneth tried to smile; "only he is in despair because I can't find a bride to share it."

"And you have no mother?"

"No. I have a pretty, fairy-like sister, but my father would never spare her to come and preside over my establishment; so, as far as we are concerned, FitzCarew will be a kind of white elephant."

The two men shook hands and parted. The Master was no sooner in his own room than Joan appeared.

"What a time you have been, dad! Why did you let that horrid man keep you?"

"Joan, he saved your life."

She tossed her head.

"Of course he did, dad, but that doesn't make him a gentleman!"

"He is one of the finest gentlemen I ever met."

Joan pouted.

"I believe you say that on purpose to tease me."

"Did I ever tease you, Joan?"

There was such a sad weariness about his tone that the girl threw her warm young arms about his neck and kissed him.

"You are tired, dear!"

He was thinking he was so tired that but for one he would gladly have lain down his weary load and been at rest. She realised dimly there was something amiss, and nestled the least bit closer to him.

"Why did you stay away so long?"

"I could not help it."

"And is the business settled?"

"Yes, child."

"Are you glad?"

He sighed. He was glad of the relief, but he knew too well that it had come all too late for him.

"Glad for your sake, child."

"And are we richer?"

His arm was close round her; he was studying her face, and he knew the time had come, the time to tell her, not that she was nameless, but that he was no longer Master of FitzCarew.

"Much poorer, Joan."

"Poorer!"

"Aye, my darling, bear it bravely. Very soon we shall have to leave Blankshire."

Her bosom heaved.

"We can't leave it, papa."

"But if we must, Joan?"

"It can't be. You are Carew of FitzCarew. You couldn't sell the dear old place!"

His breath went and came.

"Did you never guess I was in debt, Joan?—never hear that FitzCarew was mortgaged?"

"Yes," and her colour deepened; "but Sir John says if he marries me all that can be put right."

"Sir John says so."

"Yes. He asked me to be his wife, dad, and I said yes."

Great silence. The girl grew uneasy.

"Aren't you pleased?"

"Do you love him, Joan?"

"I don't think I believe in love," the girl said, half-recklessly. "Sir John is very fond of me. I daresay we shall do very well."

And this was Audrey's child—Audrey, whose whole life had been nothing but a longing for love, who with her dying lips told him all she had suffered, all she had sorrowed, was as nothing for love's dear sake.

"Aren't you glad?" repeated Joan.

"If he makes you happy. Joan, I have a strange wish; I don't want to stay here over Christmas. Let us go home and spend our Yuletide at the Park."

"Lady Aylmer!"

"If she is in her son's confidence she will know that this is our last Christmas together, and will understand my wanting you all to myself. Joan, my darling, do this one thing for me."

He pleaded as though it were for his own sake, knowing all the while it was for hers. Not for worlds would he have had his daughter Lady Aylmer's guest while he broke to her son the news he must break before the engagement between Sir John and Miss Carew was publicly announced.

The Baronet lost no time in craving a private conversation with Mr. Carew, but the Master's answer was decisive.

"I am taking Joan home in two or three days' time. Come over there and say to me what you like. I can't discuss my daughter's future away from FitzCarew."

In those two or three days Kenneth saw a great deal of his father's debtor. He grew to regard Hubert Carew with a deep, chivalrous pity, and to feel as if he would fain have restored him to his lost honours at any cost.

"I wish I had never come here," he said, impetuously, one day when he had been playing chess with the Master in the library.

"Why?"

"It makes me feel so mean. If we had calmly robbed you all these years I don't think I could feel much worse."

Hubert smiled.

"You must get rid of such thoughts."

"I wish I could."

"For my part I am thankful you came."

"Thankful!"

"Aye, to have seen the man who is to fill my place, and rule in my old home. I have been but a bad custodian of the Park. When a great sorrow came into a man's life it takes the spirit out of him. I have never held up my head since the day of Joan's birth. I am glad to think a firmer, stronger spirit than mine will have the fulfilling of the duties I neglected."

"You must have loved her well," thinking of Joan's mother.

"Too well, I fancy."

"Is Miss Carew like her mother?"

"Not in the least. She is built of a stronger, firmer mould. Trouble killed my Audrey. I sometimes think trouble will soften her daughter."

"She is not hard to those she loves," eager in her defence.

"Ah, but how few she loves! Will she ever cling to Sir John Aylmer as her mother clung to me?"

"I hope not."

Carew started.

"What do you mean?"

"Only that Sir John would never repay a woman's devotion. A wife who kept him in order and never let his follies wound her would be the fittest helpmate for Aylmer."

"Well, it will be settled soon."

"I thought it was settled."

Carew shook his head.

"We go home this afternoon, and he is coming to see me to-morrow. I suppose, Mr. Ford, most men have bitter moments in their lives, but I doubt if many are called on to suffer the humiliation I must bear to-morrow."

"You are too sensitive, sir. No man worth the name could think less highly of you or Miss Carew because her face was her fortune."

"You don't understand."

Kenneth thought him wandering.

"I think I do."

Carew shook his head.

"No poverty could have lined my face as trouble has done these nineteen years—no mere lack of wealth could make me shiver as I shiver now at the prospect of my interview with Sir John Aylmer."

An awful suspicion came to Kenneth. Had Hubert Carew's beautiful young wife died mad? Was the germ of insanity in Joan's blood?

"I have not known you a week," went on the Master, hurriedly, "but something makes me trust you. Only one man on earth knows my secret, and he is at a distance. I should like to tell you my miserable story, and see what you advise me."

Kenneth could not believe his ears as he listened. The story seemed to him too strange and wonderful; only there was that in the Master's dark eye and pale, worn face which seemed to vouch for the truth of every word. When the story was over there came a long, long silence; then, looking up, Hubert saw a strange dimness in the young man's eye.

"She must never know it."

That was all. No declamations, no protestations, just those few determined words, and Hubert felt as though a fresh strength was given even by the resolute manner of his new ally. He must be bold.

"I could not hide it—not even for her sake."

"I fancy he will be alarmed at her loss of fortune. Better he should draw back on that ground than—"

"Than refuse her because she is nameless. I understand. You think I should keep back my wretched confidence until—"

"Until you are sure poverty makes no difference to his wishes." Hubert shuddered.

"And if he marries her she will be at his mercy. In any moment of irritation or annoyance he may fling the truth in her face; and she is so proud, so true a Carew in heart and spirit, she would never get over the disgrace. It would kill her."

Sir John Aylmer betrayed no annoyance at the postponement of his happiness.

"The Carews are awfully proud," he told his mother. "I shouldn't wonder if the old gentleman thought he did me an honour than otherwise by letting me assist him."

"You are sure it is a safe investment?"

Sir John laughed.

"Twenty thousand pounds to be lord of FitzCarew! I fancy few people would refuse it."

"He may be more embarrassed than you think. It may require more money to free the estate."

"I shouldn't mind twenty-five, if it was an understood thing he resigned all claims at once in Joan's favour. I'd allow him a few hundreds a year, and he could live quietly somewhere on the Continent."

But selfish as she was even Lady Aylmer exclaimed at this,—

"You never dream of separating them, surely? Why, their attachment is something wonderful. I should have soon thought of parting a flower from the sunshine as Joan from her father."

"I should part them, and pretty thoroughly too," growled her son. "Lady Aylmer must learn to put her husband first. Besides, I shouldn't care to have any broken-down gentlemen hanging about my house. When I marry Joan I mean to be master of the Park, and of her too."

He had involuntarily raised his voice. He and his mother were sitting in a small boudoir opening to the conservatory, and Joan Carew, standing among the flowers, caught the sound of her own name. She never meant to listen. She was moving rapidly towards the door to warn them of her presence when Sir John made his last brutal speech. He had gone too far—he had lost for all time the chance of marrying the last of the Carews. With one bound the girl stood before him with flashing eye and heaving bosom.

"Sir John Aylmer," she said, in tones of icy composure, "I have been unwittingly a listener to your last words. I am thankful to the chance that has revealed to me your sentiments, and I beg unhesitatingly to refuse the honour of your hand."

"I assure you I—"

"Do not trouble yourself to invent excuses. I may be the daughter of a ruined man"—and her eyes flashed scornfully—"but I am the last descendant of a grand old race, and I would scorn to ally myself with anyone who deemed he made a sacrifice by marrying the daughter of the Master of FitzCarew."

"You will think better of this," said Lady Aylmer, quietly, "when you have seen your father."

"I am going to see him now, to ask him to order the carriage, after what has passed. I would rather not enjoy your hospitality another hour, Lady Aylmer. Sir John, I have the honour to wish you a last good-bye."

And then, calm and dignified, yet with a strange sinking at her heart, Hubert Carew's daughter left the room.

## CHAPTER VI.

A GLOOM had settled over FitzCarew; the old servants had been astonished beyond measure at the return of their master and Miss Joan a day before they were expected. No reason had been given for the sudden arrival; and tried and trusted as are the few retainers kept at the old house, none dared ask the motive, for there was a pride in the young lady's eye, a dull, silent grief on her father's face, which told more plainly than words could do that some sore evil threatened the house of Carew.

"There's ill-luck coming," said the old housekeeper, as she returned from attending Joan to her room without one kindly word of thanks. "My young lady is rarely vexed."

"And the Master has death written in his face," returned another.

Perhaps they were right. That night, in the still hours of darkness, a messenger from FitzCarew galloped off to the nearest town in search of the doctor. Hubert Carew had been found still and motionless in his chair. He refused to answer even to his daughter's voice, and the panic-stricken household sent off in hot haste for medical aid.

It was not the doctor who attended Joan after her narrow escape from drowning, but a young man, a comparative stranger to the place. He never quite forgot the sight of the pale, beautiful heiress on her knees before the couch, her hands chafing her father's cold, still ones, her voice entreating vainly every tender name to wake up and speak to her.

"He is not dead!" she moaned. "Oh! tell me that. I can bear anything in the world if only he is alive!"

"He is not dead."

With a quiet air of authority the doctor insisted on her leaving him with his patient. His experienced eye had at once discovered what was the matter, and he wanted to spare Miss Carew the sight of the agony of her father's return to consciousness.

Joan submitted to a stronger will than her own; she let the old housekeeper lead her from the room. Then the restoratives were applied, and in

half-an-hour, blue to the very lips, with an expression of keenest pain on his face, Hubert Carew opened his eyes.

"Is this death?" he asked, slowly. "I beseech you, tell me?"

Dr. Brown hesitated.

"Do not deceive me," pleaded the sufferer.

"I never deceived anyone in my life."

"And it is," naming a terrible disease. "I have often feared it. Will there be any getting better, or is this the end?"

The young doctor shook his head sorrowfully.

"Why did you keep such a thing secret? Why not have sent for me before?"

"I was not sure."

"I might have done something had I been called in six months before."

"And now?"

"I fear it is hopeless."

"Ah! I thought so," his hand clutched nervously at a damask table-cover. "Tell me one thing, how long?"

"A few weeks, it may be a few days only. There will not be much more suffering, rather a gradual sinking into rest."

"Rest!"

"Rest from all pain."

"Oh, how gladly I would welcome it! How I have yearned for it all these years, save for Joan."

"Your daughter?"

"My only child, my motherless little girl."

"She is very beautiful," said the young doctor, musingly. "She will have many friends."

"Beautiful and poor," murmured Hubert Carew, sadly. "It is a terrible combination."

There was a little pause; then there came a sharp tap at the door, and Joan entered without waiting for permission.

"You must not excite him," said Dr. Brown, very gently; and then he went out and left them together.

The next day it seemed an established fact that the Master was ill—no one spoke of his getting better. He just lay on the sofa in the library, and Joan crouched on a low stool near him, with the same thought that neither could put into words, that very, very soon a power, too strong even for love to defy, would sever them.

Joan was called away for a minute in the afternoon. When she came back she found that Mr. Carew had dragged himself to the table and was struggling to write a letter.

"Papa, you must not, you ought not!"

"I must, Joan."

"Is it to Mr. St. John?"

"No."

"Let me do it?"

He hesitated, the big drops of perspiration stood on his brow. Joan saw it and took the pen from his trembling hand. She started as she saw the words he had traced,—

"Dear Mr. Ford."

"Papa!" and there was a ring of indignation in her voice, "were you tiring yourself, perhaps making yourself ill again, to write to him?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"I wish to see him."

Joan gasped.

"Take the pen, my darling," said the Master, sadly, "and write the letter—or I must."

That prevailed. She sat down.

"What am I to say?"

"He was quite ready with the words."

"I am very ill. Will you come and see me to-morrow at eleven?"

Joan held it for him while he signed his initials. Then she directed the note, rang the bell, and sent it by special messenger to the Court. This done she came back, and took up her old position at her father's feet.

"Are you vexed, sweetheart?"

It was his pet name for her. Her sullen displeasure could not be proof against it. She could not be angry with him when it might be he was soon to leave her for always.

"Not angry."

"Sorry then?"

"I can't understand."

"Let me try and make you understand. Let me try and tell you what you ought to have known years ago, only I kept from you weakly because I could not bear to vex you."

She bowed her head upon his breast, and he went on,—

"Joan, have you ever thought of what would happen if I died?"

"Don't," with a pent-up sob.

"I must, dear. Think, Joan. It is in the course of nature you should lose me some day. Supposing I died ten, twenty years hence, what did you suppose would happen?"

"I never thought."

"Think now."

She looked up with swimming eyes.

"I should live here just as I do now, and people would call me the Lady of FitzCarew. I should never be rich or great because of the mortgages, but I should live here."

"No, my darling; my difficulties are greater than you imagine. Already, Joan, FitzCarew has passed from us."

"It couldn't."

"It has."



"But—" "But it is another's, Joan. My child, if I live I will make a fresh home for you; if not—" She burst into tears. "You must live," she sobbed. "I cannot do without you. Let Fitz-Carew go, but stay with me." "I wish I could. Child, don't you think it wrings my heart to feel how lonely you will be?" "That was why you wished me to marry Sir John?" "Yes." "What has Mr. Ford to do with this?" "It was his father who advanced me money years ago—who is now Master of FitzCarew." "Father!" "Bear it bravely, darling." "But he is not a gentleman?" "Indeed he is." "I see it all. You were never a business man, and he has taken advantage of you?" "On the contrary, he has treated me with the greatest kindness." "You are so good—you think so." "Mr. St. John, who is a business man, himself agrees with me." "And he will be master here?" "Yes." "With his shop and low tastes?" "He has no low tastes." "Dad, I would rather set fire to the old place. I would rather pull down every stone of its old walls than he should live here." "Joan!" "It is true." He sighed heavily. "If you had only known your mother she would have taught you differently." "You mean I am wicked?" "No; only proud, Joan. My darling, try and think of it in another light." "I can't." He looked at her wistfully. "Nothing in the world will soften your heart but love; love conquers pride." "I shall never love anyone." "You are not fretting for Sir John?" "Fretting! I am only glad I found out his real character. I don't believe in love."

Punctual to a moment Kenneth made his appearance at FitzCarew, and was ushered at once into the Master's presence. Joan was absent; she would not risk a meeting with the man she regarded as her enemy. "I am very sorry to see you thus, sir!" "The struggle is almost over. You did not think it a liberty that I sent for you? I know I had no right, but much is forgiven to a dying man." "I should have come even had you not sent. I have a favour to ask you, Mr. Carew." A faint smile crossed Mr. Carew's face. "I can think of nothing in my power to grant," he said, simply. "I am not going to ask you to get me a clerkship, as Miss Carew suggested. I fear I am not ambitious. I have never thought of learning my father's business." "You must not think of Joan's foolish words. Poor child, her pride is likely to have a fall!" "It is about her I want to speak to you." "And about her I sent for you. Your father has shown himself very generous to me. Do you think he would do this one thing more, and let my child stay here a few months after my death, until she has time to collect her thoughts and face her position bravely?" "I am sure he would, but—" "But you think it unadvisable." "I think—" "Speak plainly; I am not likely to take offence. Besides, I like you. You remind me of one of my boyhood's friends, Edmund Fairfax, a captain in the Life Guards." Kenneth started. "Did you really know my father?" "Your father!" "Yes, mine and Aline's. Our mother was a widow when she married Mr. Ford; of his love for her, his unwearying tenderness for us, I cannot speak. Half the world has forgotten. We are not, in blood, his children. Lady Aylmer had invited me to her house as Mr. Ford. It never entered into her heads to set the mistake right." "You are a descendant of one of the oldest families in England, and Joan—" Kenneth smiled. "I shall never claim kindred with the Fairfaxes. I cannot forget their cruel neglect of my young mother. I never thought to be glad I was not the son of my kind old stepfather, and yet such is my weakness and folly. For her sake, I can almost rejoice." The Master looked bewildered. "You have promised to listen to me," said Kenneth, impulsively. "You shall send me away afterwards if you will, but you must hear me first. I love your daughter!"

"Joan!" "Yes," and the young man's face grew bright as with some deep gladness. "I love her with my whole heart and soul. She is the only woman whose heart I have ever cared to own. She has given me nothing but scorn, and yet, such is my madness, I worship her." Hubert Carew wrung his hand. "She is not worthy of such love," he said, huskily. "She is the light of my eyes, but she has requited your kindness ill. I wish you had not told me this." "I could not help telling you. Now, will you give me any hope?" "Hope of winning her?" "I shall never win her," said Kenneth, sadly, "until she is my wife. She loves no one else, of that I am certain." "No one." "Then give her to me. You say you must leave her, and the thought troubles your last hours. Give her to me; I swear, most solemnly, to cherish her as Heaven's best gift!" "But surely you must know she does not like you!" "She hates me," was the calm reply. "I know it, but I am willing to take my chance. I would rather have Joan for my wife and know I shall never be more to her than I am now than lose her." "And you know all—that she is nameless?" "I know she is not, in the eyes of the law, your heiress, but she is your child—she loves you. For your sake, I believe, she would even stoop to marry me." "And you could be happy with a wife who did not love you?" "I think I could make her happy. I should settle this place on her at once. I mean my father would." "And he?" "He knows, and leaves me free to act as I will. I know, if she would let him, he will give your child a father's love!" The Master was silent; every instinct of his nature was against the proposed union, and yet— "Will you speak to Miss Carew?" "I can't. It seems to me, Kenneth, you are just blighting your life!" "I have asked myself whether it would be blighting hers. I think not. I believe, Heaven helping me, some day I shall win her love. She must never know I am a Fairfax of Fairfax until she has consented. I will owe my wife's hand to no ancestors; in fact, I am so generally known as Ford, I see no reason to tell her at all. The register must be signed in my true name, but no one, save the clergyman and ourselves, need be the wiser." "And you propose to marry soon?" "At once, by special license. Mr. Carew, I implore you to consent, she is so young and fair; think of her battling with the world; think—" Hubert Carew buried his face in his hands. "I accept," he said at last, slowly. "It is a cruel sacrifice that you offer, but I know if you can win my child's heart she will repay you!" "And you will mention it?" "I would rather you did that!" "I?" "If you go to the drawing-room, I will send her to you." He went. Barely a quarter of an hour, though to him it seemed an interminable interval, and the girl he loved stood before him as pale and motionless as when he drew her from a watery grave! "Will you sit down?" and he drew a low chair forward. "I prefer to stand." "Has Mr. Carew told you of my wishes?" "The Master of FitzCarew said you wished to speak to me. Be brief, if you please; I am anxious to return to him." "Then you do not know—" "I know that this house is yours, and everything in it. I know that you have come to gloat over our misery—it was worthy of you." His face grew white with pain. "Miss Carew, this is a cruel calumny! I am here at your father's request. I have asked him a favour, and he has referred me to you." "A favour?" "Do you know that he is very ill?" "He is dying!" "And his one anxiety is your future. To soothe his last hours I think you will conquer your pride and listen to me." "I am listening." "I want you to be my wife!" "Your wife?" "Yes. I want your father to have the comfort of knowing that he leaves you mistress of your old home; that, so far as wealth and human power can go, you will be shielded from all sorrow." "You must know I don't like you!" "I know that you regard me as one of your menial servants. I am not asking you to like me—I ask you to be my wife." "I see," said Joan, half aloud, half to herself; "you want a high-born wife—you offer your wealth against my long descent. It is a simple bargain!" "No!" almost thundered Kenneth; "it is no bargain. I love you as my own soul; but I am to the full as proud as you. If you will be my wife, I promise you—nay, I do more, I swear, by my mother's dead memory—that no word of love from me shall ever trouble you. You shall be entirely free, save that you must bear my name, and from time to time, I fear, suffer my society, to avoid conspurious tongues." Joan looked at him with a troubled light in her splendid eyes. "Do you know that two days ago I was engaged to another man?"

"I know it."  
 "And you are willing, in spite of that?"  
 "I am more than willing—I am anxious. I repeat my offer. Be my wife, mistress of FitzCarew. Soothe the anxiety which troubles your father, secure to yourself the old home you love so well."

"At the price of a loveless marriage?"  
 "I have heard you say you do not believe in love?"

"I do not."  
 "Then there can be no danger!"  
 "Danger!"

"Don't you see," he said, gently, "the only danger that could threaten you from this step? If you were my wife you could never be free to marry anyone else. If our hands never touched, our lips never met, yet as long as I lived you would be bound to me as irrevocably as the tenderest wife who ever wore a wedding-ring."

"I see."  
 "That is to me the only difficulty. But you say you don't believe in love!"

"Then—"  
 "I don't."  
 "Listen," she said, suddenly. "I love my father so well that I could do anything—even this—for his sake. Would you promise me never to let a word of blame rest on his memory? He has been imprudent, rash, perhaps, but never wicked. He can't help being unfortunate. If I marry you will you never throw his misfortunes in my face?"

"Whether you marry me or no I shall respect Mr. Carew to my dying day. Will you think over this? I will remain here for an hour. Will you send me word?"

She bowed her head, and left him.  
 Perhaps the suspense tried her as much as him. Perhaps she wanted the matter fixed unalterably, for in little more than half the time he had mentioned a little note was brought to him. Ken's strong hands trembled so he could hardly open it:—

"Let it be as you wish, for his sake; only remember, though I wear your wedding-ring we shall be strangers for all time."

"J. C."

Mr. Ford rang the bell, and the housekeeper appeared. Very courteously he went up to the old woman, and told her he was to marry her young lady. She almost started with surprise.

"It is quite settled," he said, severely. "Of course, under other circumstances, there would be no need for haste, but Mr. Carew's state seems to me alarming. He has no near relations to care for his daughter, so we have resolved to have the ceremony here at once by special license."

The woman stared.  
 "Miss Joan married to-day, sir?"

"Not to-day. I must go to London for the license and other matters. I cannot get back before Thursday. Will you arrange everything for six o'clock?"

"It's Christmas Eve, sir!"  
 So it was. His old father and Aline expected him at home. There would be such gladsome preparations at Briarleigh for his return, and the two loving hearts there would be disappointed; but he never hesitated.

"I know; but it cannot be helped. May I depend on you to arrange all details? Mr. Carew is too ill to be troubled, and Miss Joan is too occupied with him to think of other things."

And then he rode away.  
 "Joan!"

It was her father's voice. Joan had crept back after writing her letter, to find the Master asleep. He was awake now, and looking into his daughter's face with eager, loving eyes.

"Yes, dad?"  
 "You have seen Mr. Ford?"

"Yes."  
 "And you have consented?"

"He said you wished it."  
 "He is a good man, Joan!"

"It doesn't matter," she began, then checked herself abruptly, for instinct told her her father would be sorrowful if she let him know the extraordinary conditions she imposed on her lover. "So that you are pleased, nothing else signifies."

"I am more than pleased! You have robbed death of its last sting!"  
 "Couldn't you stay?" she whispered. "Oh, father! best beloved! how can I part from you?"

"You will have your husband."  
 She hid her face on the pillow beside his; he stroked it fondly, as he answered,—

"You do not love him now, but some day your heart will break, and be all his own. I look at it as impossible, Joan, that affection such as his should not win for itself a return at last!"

Joan answered nothing.  
 The next days passed as in a dream, only there was an undercurrent of preparation in the house, and the maid who waited on Joan brought a white dress for her mistress to try on.

"Take it away!" said Miss Carew, impatiently; "I shall never wear white again!"  
 "But Thursday, miss!"

"Christmas Eve. What should I want with a white dress then?"  
 "For your wedding, Miss Carew."

Joan opened her eyes.

"Ah! I had forgotten!"

"Everything is ready, miss. This white silk will look just the thing for a bride."

Joan shivered.

"It will be cold; and it is not like a real wedding. I will wear my black velvet."

Nothing could move her; in vain they expostulated. Miss Carew was firm. When Christmas Eve came it found her in the soft black velvet gown, holly berries at her throat and in her hair.

"She looks a picture!" said the old housekeeper, admiringly; "but not a bit like a bride; and it's dreadfully unlucky to be married in black!"

Joan did not meet her bridegroom until all was ready for the ceremony. The clergyman, who had known her all her life—no other than *Blanche Child's* father—stood ready in surplice and stole. *Blanche Child* herself, bidden by Mr. Carew's special request, stood behind Joan. Perhaps she alone noticed how white and haggard looked the bridegroom, how icy and statuesque his bride.

It was very short. The responses were prompt and audible. A very short time, and it was over. Joan Carew was a wedded wife, and Kenneth was tied for all time to a girl who hated him.

There was a pause; then Mr. Child addressed Joan by her new name, and wished her joy. She answered like a person in a dream; then she heard her husband's voice.

"Will you allow me to speak to you, Joan?"

Half-unconscious she followed him to the drawing-room. The blazing yule log made a roddy glow, the Christmas firelight brightened up the whole apartment; holly and mistletoe were plentifully strewn around. Kenneth noted it all dimly as he placed his wife in a low chair by the hearth—his wife, Heaven help him, who did not love him!

"Mr. Carew seems better to night."

"Much better."

"The doctor tells me there is no immediate danger, so I think of leaving you to spend your Christmas together. It seems hard you should be troubled with a stranger."

She trembled so violently that he took up a thick crimson shawl and wrapped it round her.

"Don't you think it best?"

"Won't people talk?"

"I think not. Your father is so ill they will understand. I should only be a *give* upon you. And if your people want me—"

She was bitterly hurt.

"Pray do not consider me in your movements," rising.

"Sit down. I will not keep you another moment. Your servants have my full address, and will telegraph for me at once if there is any change."

"Very well."

He glanced round the room.

"How cheerful it all looks in the bright Yuletide. I wonder if you and I shall ever spend a Yuletide together, Joan; whether years will ever draw you nearer to me."

"Your promise," she began—

"And I shall keep my word, have no fears. You shall never be more to me than you are now, Joan, unless it be of your own free will."

"That will be never."

"We will not discuss that. Will you be angry if I ask you to accept this?"

He had put into her hands a daisy aigrette, made entirely of diamonds, an ornament of no mean value, as Joan knew instinctively. She drew back.

"It is not from me," said her husband, coldly. "I shall never press gifts upon you. It is my father's wedding present, and I cannot bear to go back to the old man and tell him it is rejected."

Joan softened.

"He sent it to me?"

"He sent it with his blessing to my wife."

"Does he know?"

Kenneth understood.

"No; I could not tell him. He wrote, and hoped you would be to me what my mother was to him. I could not find it in my heart to tell him after that."

There were tears in her eyes. She took the jewel, and placed it in her hair.

"You will thank him for me!"

"Yes."

"You are going to him now? What are those flowers?" for she had caught sight of a bouquet lying on the table.

"My sister sent them for me to give to you. She fancied you would wear no bridal flowers save of my choosing, and so she made my father bring her to London to find those she liked best. It was a childish fancy, but she is so young; she couldn't understand a courtship such as ours."

Joan's hand was stretched out for the flowers. Pretty helpless things! it hurt her woman's heart to see them lie there neglected—but Mr. Ford calmly gathered them together and tossed them into the flames. Then he said, abruptly,—

"I will not detain you longer. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

And so, without even a hand-clasp, the wedded pair parted, in all the gladness of that bright Yuletide. Joan went back to her father's couch, Kenneth rode off into the darkness of the winter's night with an aching heart.



## CHAPTER VII.

It comes to most of us, at some time or other in our lives, to hide our deepest sorrows from those we love best in the world; and so it was with Kenneth. He spent his Christmas at home and then hurried back to his wife, enjoining upon her that she must travel, telling her he would leave her free as air, as she wished it. After a stormy scene he gave her his ultimatum.

"Mrs. St. John and one of her married daughters are proposing to go South, and I have arranged for you to accompany them," he said.

"Oh!"

"Mrs. Irwell, the daughter, is about your own age. She struck me as a very sweet, amiable girl; I think you are sure to like her."

"I hate sweet, amiable people."

"The St. Johns were your father's friends."

She would not soften even at that allusion.

"What shall you do?"

"I! Oh! I shall go home."

Joan threw herself back on the sofa, as though to intimate the interview was at an end. Kenneth wished her good-night, and left her.

They did not meet again till Monday, and then Mrs. Ford was surprised to see her maid seated in the brougham which was to convey them to the station.

"Where is my husband?" she asked, sharply.

"The Master has ridden on, ma'am; he wished to secure a reserved carriage."

The Master! The title grated on Joan's ear.

But the reserved carriage proved to be only for her and her maid. Kenneth travelled in a smoking compartment. He made his appearance at King's-cross in time to hand his wife to the platform, and at that moment Marston St. John joined them. Kenneth turned to them at once.

"If you will take care of Mrs. Ford I will see to the luggage."

The lawyer led Joan to the waiting-room.

"My dear," he said, kindly; "you have lost your father, and yet I must congratulate you. I never saw anyone who took my fancy so much as Mr. Ford."

"Papa liked him."

"And papa's daughter. How do you like the idea of this foreign tour?"

"Very much."

Her pride was up in arms. She would never let the St. Johns know that she was sent into exile against her will. As far as in her power was she would keep her own counsel, and let no one suspect the true state of affairs between her and her husband.

"It is a pity Mr. Ford could not get away to join us."

"His time is not his own."

"Ah! I wonder he can spare you."

"He thinks me looking ill."

"Well, I prophesy we shall bring you back hale and hearty; we are going solely on Nettie's account."

Enter Kenneth, rather flushed, and evidently in a hurry. He led the way to the brougham, handed in his wife, and stood, hat in hand, until the carriage was out of sight.

"He returns by to-night's express. I wish he could have dined with us," commented hospitable Mr. St. John.

"He never said good-bye to me; he never promised to write to me," thought poor Joan, and, throwing herself back into her corner, she shed bitter tears behind her crepe veil.

And there was another difficulty. Her purse held just half-a-sovereign. How was she to manage with that sum for several months? How could she write and ask Mr. Ford for money? He ought to have thought of it; his neglect was abominable.

But when kind Mrs. St. John had installed Joan in a pretty bedroom and left her alone the first thing she saw was a letter, which had evidently come by post, and was addressed to her in her husband's writing. She took it up a little eagerly, then sat down to read it, hoping, in spite of herself, that his written words would be more tender than those he addressed to her by word of mouth.

She was disappointed. The letter ran thus:—

"DEAR JOAN,—I have made every arrangement with Mr. St. John, so that you need feel under no obligation to him during your travels. You will, of course, need money for your *menus*, pleasures, &c. I enclose a bank-note. Mr. St. John will, I am sure, cash it for you, or act as your banker if you object to the care of money. Should it be insufficient send for more. There is nothing would annoy me more than your denying yourself in any way. Wishing you a pleasant journey,—Yours sincerely,

"K. F."

"It is monstrous!" cried Joan, speaking aloud in vexation. "He expects me to take his money, and he treats me like—!" She stopped for want of a simile.

The note had fallen unheeded to her feet. She took it up, and glanced idly at the amount. A thousand pounds! Evidently her husband was no miser, since he reckoned her private expenses at fifty pounds a week!

"I shall send it back to him," was her first resolve.

But the thought of the single half-sovereign in her purse stopped her. Eventually she took the note to Mr. St. John.

"Will you take care of this? I shan't want a quarter of it to spend."

"All right, my dear. Mr. Ford is a liberal husband!"

"I suppose he has plenty of money!"

"Evidently!"

"I dare say he thinks me extravagant. I shall make this last for yours."

"That won't be necessary."

"Why?"

"Because your private income is four thousand a year. This note represents a quarter's allowance."

Joan gasped.

"But—"

"You married a rich man's son. Mr. Ford came up to London directly he heard of the engagement, and settled FitzCarew and its revenues on you. I believe he wished to give the estate to his son; but your husband preferred the existing arrangement."

Joan gave a little sigh.

"I wish—"

"What do you wish, my dear? If it lies in human power to gratify your desires I don't think you will have to wish in vain."

"I wish we had been married as other people are!"

The lawyer was puzzled.

"I should not have thought you cared for show and grandeur."

Then to his surprise he saw that she was crying.

"My dear, my dear, you must not!"

"Don't you see," said Joan, gently, "he gives me all—home wealth. All I had was my old descent! If we had had a grand wedding, if it had been noised about far and wide that he married a daughter of FitzCarew, it seems to me it would have been fairer."

"Fairer!"

"Yes—less one-sided. Now I take all and give nothing!"

"You give yourself," said the old lawyer, gravely. "My dear, I am very sure your husband values nothing in the world so highly as your love."

They went abroad, but the change was not all pleasure to Joan. Nettie Irwell was, like herself, a wife of very recent date. Unlike Joan, her husband was a man of very small means; it was impossible for him to leave his occupation. When his wife's health was threatened, he had to entrust her to his parents; but every post brought loving, tender letters, full of regrets for her absence, full of ardent longings for her return. Joan, who had more gold than she knew what to do with, would have bartered it all gratefully, gladly, for one such letter as came to sweeten Nettie's exile.

She was saved one pang—letters came early, and were all taken to their recipients' bedrooms—she had not to sit at the breakfast-table the only one unremembered. With rare tact no one asked her why she wrote so seldom. No one inquired or doubted that the few letters she did write were to her husband.

"We think of going to Paris next week," Mrs. St. John said to her one fair April day. "Nettie is so much better that we may safely venture. Do you like the idea, Joan?"

"Very much."

"Mr. Irwell is coming over to meet us—he has managed a week's holiday. It is a pity your husband could not do the same."

Then they had asked him, and he had refused. Poor Joan! It was humiliating to hear such things from a third person.

"He is very busy."

"Yes, and he has set his heart on being at FitzCarew to welcome you home. He has most kindly invited Mr. St. John and me to accompany you."

Joan's face fell. Politeness required her to express pleasure, but she could not find words.

Mrs. St. John went on quickly,—

"But though we are old people we have not forgotten our youth, and I am quite sure after such a separation you will enjoy having each other alone for a little time, so we mean to send you down to Blankshire under a trusty escort, and follow in a few weeks."

Joan hugged the dear old lady.

Mrs. St. John did not think it necessary to say they had not told Mr. Ford of their intentions.

"I can't make it out," she said to her daughter, later on. "I am sure Joan loves her husband, and your father says he just worships the ground she treads on, and yet—"

It was visible to them all. Try as they would to hide their doubts they could see quite plainly there was something wanting to Joan's married felicity.

The month in Paris passed off well, but it seemed to Joan to have leaden wings. She wanted to be at home; she wanted to see with her own eyes what changes had been made there.

She was gazing from the carriage window long before the platform came in sight, and, in spite of herself, her heart beat wildly when she recognised her husband.

He met her as though they had parted the day before, handed her out, and then turned for her companions.

"Where are the St. Johns, Joan?"

"They could not come—they were wanted at home."

"I am afraid you will be very dull."

He placed her in the luxurious carriage, drawn by dashing bays, took his seat at her side, and asked gently if she were quite well and strong.

"Perfectly."

"Ready for a north-country summer?"

"Yes."

"Ah, you will believe in my prescriptions in future. There have been great changes in Blankshire since you went away."

"I have heard nothing—you never wrote."

"I remembered our compact."

Joan wished the compact at the bottom of the sea.

"As I went away for my health you might have cared to inquire how I was."

"I did inquire."

"I never had the letter."

"I wrote to Mrs. St. John every week, and she answered by return of post."

Joan bit her lips.

"What are the changes you spoke of?"

"Aylmer Court has changed hands."

Joan tried very hard not to blush, and failed dimly.

"Indeed, how is that?"

"Sir John was involved in some disastrous speculations, and failed. His name was in the *Gazette*, and everything went to the hammer."

"I am very sorry."

"I thought you would be. I feared so."

"I mean I am sorry for his mother. I always had a liking for Lady Aylmer."

"And I detested her."

"Why?"

"Because she set up for being a fine lady."

"And do you detest fine ladies?"

"Don't put me through a catechism," he said, with a little laugh. "Have you no curiosity to know who owns the Court?"

"No one I know."

"Someone who knows you then."

"You don't mean your sister?"

"Aline? Oh no! I mean the Rector's daughter."

"Blanche Child?"

"She is not Blanche Child now. The man she was engaged to came into a lot of money, took the name of some eccentric old godfather, and settled down as a country gentleman."

"And married her?"

"To be sure. That was all he wanted money for."

"They used to be very fond of each other."

"They are still."

Joan gave a little sigh.

"Some people have everything."

"They waited a long time," said Kenneth, slowly; "five years, I think."

Then old Rastcourt died, and they were made happy."

"They would have been happy anyhow."

"Perhaps."

"Blanche had no ambition."

"I suppose not. You had better give her a little of yours."

"I have none."

"Too much, I fear. I suppose with beauty such as yours it is natural. You would have graced a coronet!"

"I wish you wouldn't tease me."

"I did not mean to. Seriously, Joan, you know you would have been happier with a title. You might have loved an earl or a marquis. It was cruel of me to take advantage of your grief and loneliness, and make you the wife of a plain man of business like myself."

"I don't believe in love," she said, sharply. "I have told you so before."

"We are getting on dangerous ground," he said, coldly. "We are like two strangers. We ought never to get beyond the trivialities of small talk."

Joan answered nothing, only when the carriage stopped, and she put back her veil, Kenneth saw that she had been crying. His heart ached then for her and for himself.

## CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER all, things never happen quite as people expect. Mr. and Mrs. St. John found themselves quite unable to leave home again after their long absence, and, consequently, Joan and her husband were left alone at Fitz-Carew.

Looking back on that time afterwards Joan often wondered how she lived through it. She was luxuriously provided for in every way; her comfort was studied, Kenneth treated her with every possible courtesy, but the heart seemed to have gone out of his kindness. She had nothing to complain of, nothing to wish for, only she was wretched—unutterably wretched.

And he saw it. He knew that all his love had not made her happy, and at last he grew to deplore this hurried marriage almost as much as she did, but only for her sake. Only one person suspected aught of the state of affairs.

Blanche Rastcourt, happy in her own married life, could not fail to see the failure of her friend's. She never put her knowledge into words until, one June afternoon, the Master of Fitz-Carew came over, and asked to see her alone.

"Is anything the matter?" noticing with woman's instinct how pale and careworn he seemed.

"I am going away."

"Going away?"

"It is the only thing to do. Mrs. Rastcourt, I married knowing my wife's heart was not mine. I thought I could be brave and live out my life at her side, knowing I could never be more to her than a stranger, but I find the struggle too hard."

Blanche looked her sympathy.

"But you cannot leave her alone!"

"I have engaged a companion for her. Her old governess came down last week on a visit. Miss Dormer will be quite ready to let her stay lengthen into years."

"And Joan?"

"It will be a relief to her. I think at times she almost hates me."

"She cannot."

"She does. Well, it is all I can do for her—to go away. Mrs. Rastcourt, will you do this one thing for me. So far as in your power lies, will you be kind to my wife?"

"I will."

"She is so young," he said, wistfully, "and so beautiful, it seems cruel to leave her; and yet it is for her sake."

"She may find out she is not so indifferent as you think for."

He shook his head.

"I have lost all hope."

That very evening after dinner he went into the drawing-room—the room where he and Joan had made their fatal compact. His wife was at the piano, singing that sweetest of all love-songs, "Where sparrows build." Each note fell on his heart like a knell. Was it true, after all? Had she really loved John Aylmer? Was the loss of him the old sorrow which woke and ached, "Joan, I want you!"

He did want her, his whole heart yearned for her. Hers stirred strangely at the words; but she only said, coldly,—

"What do you want to say?"

"Only good-bye."

"Good-bye?"

"I shall be gone to-morrow before you are awake."

"This is a very sudden journey."

"No; I have been a month at Fitz-Carew. A business man has not much time at his own disposal."

"When shall you be back?"

He played half-nervously with a white rose in a glass on the table.

"I don't know."

"But you must know. What am I to say when people call and ask when I expect you home?"

"When you expect me back," he corrected, quickly. "Oh, you can tell them business affairs will probably detain me some time."

She stamped her little foot.

"You care for nothing but money."

"And yet it has brought me little happiness."

"Aren't you happy?"

"Are you?"

She shook her head; a tear trembled in her eye. They were nearer an understanding then than they had ever been before.

"I am very sorry," he said, brokenly; "I wish I could free you from the yoke you find so heavy. Believe me, Joan, if tears of blood could blot out our marriage, it should be blotted out."

Her pride was aroused then; she thought he repented for his own sake.

"A gentleman would not say such things!"

"And I am not a gentleman? Well, Joan, after to night you will be free from my presence for a long time."

"Am I to stay here all alone?"

"Miss Dormer will remain as your companion."

"I don't want her."

"You may be glad of her. Then you have your friend, Mrs. Rastcourt."

"She is not my friend. I hate her."

"Joan!"

"I do," cried poor passionate, wilful Joan. "She has everything in the world. She knows I am wretched, and she comes here to gloat over my misery."

"You are totally mistaken."

"I am always mistaken according to you. I believe you think Blanche Rastcourt perfection."

"I think her a tender-hearted, loving woman."

"Why didn't you marry her instead of me?"

He smiled in spite of that pain at his heart.

"There were two drawbacks to that scheme, Joan. She did not love me, and she was engaged to some one else."

Joan was angry. She would not see his outstretched hand; she would not echo his good-bye. She just walked coldly and silently from the room.

"Of course he won't go," thought the wilful girl, as she sobbed herself to sleep. "He couldn't go like that, without even touching my hand."

He never had touched it—never since the moment when he placed his ring upon it, and that other time she knew not of, when, senseless, she had been carried in his arms.

Joan meant to get up early, but hours of sobbing wore her out. She sank at last into a heavy feverish slumber, and it was past nine o'clock when she opened her tired eyes to see her maid at her bedside.

"Will you get up, ma'am, or shall I bring your breakfast here?"

"Have they breakfasted downstairs?"

"Miss Dormer breakfasted at seven o'clock with the Master."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"Mr. Ford gave orders you were not to be disturbed, ma'am. He had a very wet drive to the station. It came on to pour just as the dog-cart started."

Then he had really gone. Joan closed her eyes.

"And breakfast, ma'am?"

"I don't want any."

But Miss Dormer hearing this carried up a tray to her ex-pupil with her own hands. She pitied the unhappy girl, and made much of her; but she little guessed the misery at her heart.

Joan had plenty of self-command. She knew she must guard her secret from her kind old friend, so she ascribed her paleness to a headache, and



suffered herself to be dressed and placed on a sofa in her boudoir. She was hardly there when Mrs. Eastcourt was announced.

"I cannot see her."

The message was delivered, and Blanche drove away, not in the least offended, only wondering what she could do to unite this pair, who were so near and yet so far.

She heard from others that Mrs. Ford had recovered from her indisposition; that she seemed the gayest of the gay; that now her *crêpe* was laid aside. She went to every gaiety Blankshire afforded. She heard all this, and she met the lonely wife herself often in society. She saw a smile on her lips, heard the ripple of her laughter, and turned away with a shiver of pain.

"Alan, what is to be done," she asked her husband one morning after a picnic, where Mrs. Ford's flirtation with a young officer had been the theme of every tongue.

"Ford ought never to have left her."

"I believe she loves him, and is just pretending not to care."

"I don't see what we can do."

"He is so good and brave, and she is very lovable. Why can't they be happy?"

"Why don't you go and talk to her?"

"She is always out when I call."

"I expect, Blanche, there is only one person who could soften her."

"Kenneth?"

"Kenneth's sister. Don't you remember, Blanche, when we stayed there just after our wedding, what a fairy sunbeam she was?"

"Joan would shut her heart against her just because her name was Ford."

"It isn't Ford."

"Alan?"

"Don't you know neither Kenneth nor his sister Aline, or Lina as everybody calls her, are really old Mr. Ford's children. Their name is Fairfax."

"When did he tell you?"

"Just before he left. It seems there have been two or three unexpected deaths in his father's family, and now there is every chance of his some day succeeding to the title and becoming Earl of Lincross."

"If Joan only knew!"

"It would harden her still more. No; their one chance of happiness is for her to love him before she knows he can make her a countess."

"Shall I write to Lina, Alan?"

"It could do no harm."

Some days later the sweetest of fairies was sitting in Blanche's own morning-room, cooily lounging in a low chair, her feet on the fender, for Ken had been absent some time now, and winter was here again.

"Now, do you agree to my plot, Lina?"

"I want to see Ken's wife, but I know I shall not like her."

"Why?"

"She makes him so unhappy."

"And she is miserable herself. Lina, it would be a grand thing to bring them together."

"But how can I?"

"You can make her love you. If only Joan loved some one it might save her."

"Save her from what?"

"Herself."

"Won't she suspect?"

"No, she has never even heard the name of Fairfax. When you are friends you can let out you live at Briarleigh; then, perhaps, she will speak of her husband."

"I feel like an arch-conspirator. Ken believes I am in London."

"Never mind."

"Why don't you try to make things right; you have known Joan for years?"

"She distrusts me, I fancy," and here Blanche laughed, as though to show how ridiculous the bare idea was to her. "She is actually jealous of me."

Mrs. Ford neglected the Eastcourts persistently; she was always "not at home" when Blanche called. She was distant when they met abroad, but she could not bring herself to be openly rude. When Mrs. Eastcourt wrote she had a young friend staying with her, to whom it would be a great pleasure to see the picture-gallery of FitzCarew, Joan not only acceded gracefully, but invited the two ladies to lunch.

"This is famous," said Blanche. "Now I shall be ill and send you alone. I expect you to work wonders, my little friend."

It chanced that Miss Dormer was laid up with a bad cold, so the mistress of FitzCarew was obliged to receive her guests alone. She wore a soft black silk, its folds uniting her exquisite figure; her hair was done in thick, Grecian coils. She looked very lovely, but no one could have taken her for a happy woman.

"I wish I had not asked them. The girl will be a country bumpkin, and Blanche Eastcourt will look at me reprovingly, and ask if I have heard from Kenneth. Then Captain Granville is coming this afternoon, and she'll be shocked."

But when she rose to meet her guests she was astonished to see only one visitor—a slight, fairy-looking girl. She looked so sweet and fragile, so nervous and distressed, that Joan's very heart went out to her.

"I am very sorry," began the stranger gently, "but Mrs. Eastcourt is ill. There was no time to let you know, as she hoped you would excuse my coming alone."

In age there was, perhaps, two years between the girls; but one was a child, the other a woman with an aching heart.

"We must introduce ourselves," said Joan, with a strange charm of manner she knew so well how to use. "I have not even heard your name!"

"I am Lina Fairfax. I am making a long visit to Mrs. Eastcourt."

"I have never met you there."

"I only came last week."

"And you are old friends!"

"Hardly that. They stayed with us a little while in the spring, and they were very kind to me."

The two were soon seated at a pleasant *déjeûner* repast. Every distrustful thought had gone out of Lina's heart. She had been ready to hate Kenneth's wife for making him unhappy; she could only love this beautiful, sad-faced girl, who was so evidently lonely.

She was taken all over the house. Joan showed the pictures, only when she came to Hubert Carew's portrait her eyes filled with tears.

"Forgive me," she said, brokenly; "but he only died on Christmas Day, and he was all I had in the world!"

Aline slipped her hand into Joan's, and looked at her, with her blue eyes full of sympathy.

"I have a father, too," she said, "and I think if he died it would break my heart. I can't remember my mother. Dad is just all I have."

"It was the same with us—and he died!"

"But you are married?" said Aline, simply.

Joan blushed.

"Yes; but my husband is a great deal from home. He does not care for Blankshire."

"Why, I thought——"

She broke off abruptly; but Joan's bright eyes were fixed on her with an eager, questioning gaze.

"You are Mrs. Eastcourt's guest," she said, slowly. "I dare say she has told you I made my husband so unhappy he did not care to stay here! I know she thinks me a specimen of unkindness."

"Oh, no! she never said so. Only——"

"Only what?" said Joan, a little sharply.

"My home is in Briarleigh," said Aline, gathering courage, "and I have known the Fords all my life. Mr. Ford told me once Blankshire was the loveliest county he had ever seen."

"You know my husband?"

"I have known him ever since he was a child. He and my father are sworn friends. I was praising up the beauties of our village one day, and Mr. Ford said if I had seen Blankshire and FitzCarew I should never think Briarleigh pretty again."

Joan shivered, as though struck by a sudden pain. Why had not Kenneth married this beautiful creature! Did he repent now not having done so?

"Have you seen Mr. Ford lately?"

"Oh, yes! He often came to our house before he went abroad."

White to her very lips grew the mistress of FitzCarew.

"Abroad," she said, faintly. "I did not know."

Aline would not look at the pale face. She went on firmly,——

"He sailed for Africa a few weeks ago. I think he had to see his father's colonial agents."

Joan sank on to a seat. Her self-command broke down, and she cried as though her very heart were breaking.

"I am his wife," she said, slowly, "and he lets me hear of his absence through a stranger!"

"I am very sorry," said Aline, simply. "I never dreamed that——"

"I did not know!"

Aline knelt down at Joan's side, and put one arm round her waist.

"He will come back," she whispered. "I know papa told me he would not be gone long. They expect him in December."

"But not back to me! He hates me! He told me once if tears of blood could blot out our marriage he would shed them willingly!"

She had broken into a passionate fit of sobbing.

"He could not," said Aline, firmly—"he could not!"

"He said so. It was in June, before he left me. Fancy, we have been married a year, and we have been together only one month!"

"Perhaps he thought you would be happier without him?"

"I am miserable!"

"He looked miserable, too," said Aline, gently. "When first he came to see us after he came back from Blankshire, I thought he looked ten years older, and he never smiled."

"He was regretting his mistake."

"What mistake—loving you?"

"He never loved me!"

"Do you remember last Christmas?"

"Is it kind to ask me? Can I ever forget it?"

"Last Christmas," whispered Aline, "I was staying at his father's house. I heard him tell them of his marriage. I never heard such joy in any man's voice, such deep content, as when he said those two words, 'my wife!'"

"I used to think he loved me."

"He loves you now."

"But he has left me!"

At that moment a servant came to say that Captain Granville was in the drawing-room. A burning blush swept over Joan's face.

"Tell him I am engaged."

Left alone she turned quickly to Aline,

"Have you ever met the Captain?"

"Never!"

"But you have heard of him?"

"Yes."

"What——"

"I would rather not tell you."

"But I want to know!"

Trembling like an aspen-leaf Aline answered,—

"They say if he had come a year earlier he would have been your choice."

"I hate him!"

"I thought you liked him?"

"I must amuse myself. My husband cares nothing what becomes of me. The Captain worships the ground I tread on; why should I trust him with rudeness?"

Aline looked wistfully up at her with her deep blue eyes.

"Do you love your husband?"

There was no parrying that question.

"It is no use my loving him; he hates me!"

"Don't you think you will drift farther from him if you listen to Captain Granville?"

"There is no harm in the Captain?"

"Would Mr. Ford like his being here so often?"

"I don't know!"

Mrs. Eastcourt's carriage was announced, and Joan saw her visitor prepare to depart. It seemed to the lonely wife a ray of sunshine was to leave her.

"I wish you were my friend!" she said, slowly.

"I should like to be!"

"Mrs. Eastcourt would tell you I am far too bad."

For all answer Aline kissed her.

"We are both motherless," she said, timidly, "and I like you. I will be your friend if only you will let me."

"And you won't tell the Fords?"

"No."

"Do you write to her?"

"Who?"

"Miss Ford."

"Oh, no!"

"Don't you like her?" a little sharply. "I fancied she was a good sort of a child, not refined and fairy-like like you, but honest and stupid."

"I never thought whether I liked her. Your husband is devoted to her."

"Ah! how she must hate you!"

"Her one desire is to see you. I have heard her ask again and again when you were coming to Briarleigh?"

"Never!"

"Perhaps you may change your mind?"

"And you will come again?"

"Gladly!"

Joan went back to her solitude in the drawing-room, but, to her surprise, it was not unoccupied. Captain Granville was sitting by the fire.

"I sent word I was engaged!"

"But I was not in a hurry."

"I did not wish to see you!"

"Be merciful to your slave!" he said, in a voice of gallantry which jarred on her every nerve. "I have ridden eight miles on purpose to see you."

"I told you I was engaged!"

"With a good little girl from the country; of course, I understood."

"You understood what?"

"That you did not wish the innocent dove to know upon what very intimate terms we stand. She might carry the alarm to Blankshire and warn her brother."

"Her brother!"

"You are surely aware that the young lady who has just left you is your husband's sister?"

"I don't believe it."

"It is a fact."

"She introduced herself as Miss Fairfax."

"That is her true name."

"But—"

"But your immaculate husband has deceived you somewhat. He is the stepson of Mr. Ford, the manufacturer. From a fit of sulks with his father's family he has chosen to drop his real name, but he is none the less Kenneth Fairfax."

"One name is as good as another."

"You take it easily."

"I never upset myself for trifles."

"He married you, and neglects you shamefully, and yet you defend him!"

"I am not aware that he neglects me."

"Joan," and the Captain looked into her eyes, "why did not fate send me here a little earlier—in time to save you from your captor?"

He had taken her hand, but she wrenched it from him with a jerk.

"How dare you—oh! how dare you?"

"Come," he said, coolly; "you can't be surprised at my declaring my affection. Haven't you led me on for weeks?"

"No!"

"Nonsense! All the county knows that I am your favoured admirer, that but for a certain gentleman in Yorkshire you would be my very own property."

"This is insult!" cried Joan. "Leave the room!"

For all answer he took both her hands and held them captive, so that she had no choice but to listen.

"I have loved you ever since I saw you. From the moment I heard your voice I swore you should be mine. Confess but for the shadowy tie which binds you to another you would readily be mine!"

"It is not a shadowy tie."

"It is a legal marriage," he said, stiffly. "Of course, with your experience, you were careful to secure that. Everyone knows that Ford married you in a moment's generosity, and would gladly be free from you."

Her cheeks burnt.

"He was rich and I was poor, but even penniless it is no disgrace to marry a Carew."

"Ah! you regard the match as an equal bargain. Poverty and a grand old name versus riches and trade. I dare say most people agree with you, but I happen to be behind the scenes."

"What do you mean?"

"That you have no right to resent my attentions; that you have hung yourself at my head and tried to attract me, as might have been expected from your origin."

"My origin is known to all," said Joan. "I am the last of the Carews, and as such I once more order you to leave this house."

Her hand was on the bell, but he interposed.

"Before you summon your servants to expel me you had better listen to the truth. You have indulged in very strong language to me—you have rejected my affection with scorn. I tell you in return that were you free ten times I would not now entrust my honour to your keeping. Were Kenneth Fairfax dead to-morrow I would not marry his widow, the nameless, outcast daughter of Hubert Carew."

The girl had clasped her hands in wild despair. Something in his tone made her certain his words were true.

"Your mother was not your father's wife," he went on, brutally. "The late Mrs. Carew died only a few days before her husband. You, who have boasted of the Carews, have never really been a Carew at all! You are nothing but the nameless daughter of the last of the race, and as such Kenneth Fairfax married you."

He was gone.

When Joan came to herself, when she could open her eyes again she was lying on the sofa in her own boudoir, and kind old Miss Dormer, aroused in haste from her own bed, was watching over her.

Dr. Browne, the medical attendant who had been at her father's last illness, was there. To him Joan turned, with a piteous question,—

"Is it true?"

"My dear Mrs. Ford, what has troubled you?"

"Is it true?"

"Is what true? The servants found you in a swoon on the floor. We supposed you over-tired yourself in the picture-gallery; and when Miss Fairfax left you, you just reached the drawing-room and fainted."

The poor eyes wandered round the room.

"Was I quite alone?"

"Perfectly. There had been no visitors save Miss Fairfax. Captain Granville had been denied."

Still that piteous, anxious expression.

Dr. Browne had sent everyone away. He felt there would be no rest, no calm for that troubled spirit, until the brain was released from its load of fear.

"Now, tell me what troubles you?"

"I cannot."

"Don't say that. I am not an old man, Mrs. Ford, but I am old in experience. Your father trusted me—won't you do the same?"

"I can't."

"Do you think I imagine your illness a common one? I know perfectly; you fainted from some terrible shock."

"Yes."

"Had you bad news of Mr. Ford?"

"Oh, no."

"Can't you be frank? Was it that a villain presumed on the careless freedom of your manners? As I drove up I met Captain Granville on horse-back; he seemed to have come from FitzCarew."

"Yes."

"Do you know he is no fit associate for a good woman—that the best houses in the place are closed against him?"

"I thought people were too particular."

"And you liked him?"

"He amused me. I liked to make people think I was not fretting at my husband's absence."

"I expect myself you have been eating your heart away about it."

She blushed.

"And you have been playing with edged tools in the shape of Captain Granville."

"He will never come here again."

"I am glad to hear it."

"But he told me—oh! I cannot tell you, it is too cruel, too wicked."

"Can guess. He told you that Mr. Ford was the son of Colonel Fairfax and great-nephew of the Earl of Linross."

Joan gasped.

"He never told me that."

"Then your husband will not thank me for letting out his secret. He told me he cared nothing himself for rank or honour, but he thought it would please you to be a peeress."

"It wasn't that."

"Listen," said the Doctor, gently. "You are very young, your whole life's happiness is at stake. Let me tell you one thing. You are the wife of a man I honour more than any other, whom I count it a privilege to call my friend. Whatever calumny was said against him is false."

"It wasn't against him."

"What was it?"

"He said that I—my mother—"

Dr. Browne guessed all.

"The scoundrel!"



"It is not true, then!"

"My poor child, listen. It was your father's dying charge that this should be kept from you. It was your husband's great desire that the truth should be never hinted at, but the truth is more merciful now." And then, in simple, kindly words, he told her the story of her young mother's life and death.

"And he knew it!"

"Who?"

"Kenneth."

"Of course. He told your father it was his one excuse for hurrying on the wedding. You were so proud that if a glimmering of the truth reached you, you would never listen to him."

"And I laughed at him for his trouble, while all the time he was an earl's grandson, and I was nameless."

"He never valued his relationship to Lord Linross but for your sake. He loved you too well to care for anything but your heart."

"And I have scorned him."

"You have only been married a few months. You have your whole life before you to make amends."

"But he has gone away!"

"A word from you will recall him."

"He will never come back."

"Nonsense!"

"I shall never see him again; besides," and her cheeks flushed, "if this gets abroad how shall I face him?"

"Never fear. Granville may frighten a woman, but he is too much of a coward to brave a man's anger. He has behaved villainously to you, but I don't think he will dare to tell the story to anyone else."

"I wish I were dead."

"Why?"

"I am so miserable."

"You are only twenty," said Dr. Browne, cheerfully. "Just put your pride in your pocket, and be happy for the rest of your life."

"But if he won't—"

"Won't what?"

"Forgive me?"

Dr. Browne smiled.

"He loves you."

"He did once."

"Men like that don't change."

But that scene had had effects on Joan. The next morning she was weak and tired. Before a week had passed it was all over the county that she was dying—that the cruel fever was sapping her strong, young life.

Aline Fairfax and Blanche Eastcourt were her devoted nurses, and many were their consultations if they should send for Kenneth.

"He would be too late; and it would break his heart," said Aline; "besides, we ought to know what she wishes."

But long before that dreadful struggle between life and death was over news came from Africa that Kenneth was returning. He would be in London on the seventeenth of December, and go straight to Briarleigh. There was no mention of his wife. The letter—a very brief, sad one—was to Lina, but the fact that he was coming was sufficient. If only death would give up his victim happiness might yet return to FitzCarew.

A few nights after Aline, who was sitting with the invalid, noticed the large black eyes watching her; and oh! joy, there was no longer a feverish glitter in their depths. Very gently Lina took her hand.

"You are better, darling!"

"Who are you?"

"I am Kenneth's sister and yours. You have been very, very ill, but you are getting better now."

"I don't want to get better."

"For his sake."

"He doesn't want me!"

"He does!"

"He is in Africa."

"He is on his way home. He will be at Briarleigh in a fortnight."

"But not here!"

"That won't matter. I am going to take you to Briarleigh as soon as ever you are well enough to travel."

"But your father!"

"Dad wants you too. Do you know, Joan, he was here all the worst part of your illness, and he says if you are given back to us you must be his very own child!"

Joan's eyes filled with tears.

"It sounds as if I would be happy," she said, feebly; "but I can't be—something will happen."

But nothing did. Before the seventeenth of December Aline had taken her sister-in-law home to Briarleigh, very white and languid, but still very lovely. The whole household had fallen in love with Mr. Kenneth's bride, and Joan was speedily installed as the darling of the household. No one had written to tell her husband of her illness, and her arrival at his own home. Aline and Joan both agreed they would surprise him.

"He may not love me," said the girl, who had thought herself heiress of FitzCarew, with a plaintive, wistful truth; "but he will be sorry for me, and let me stay with him when he hears how lonely I am."

So they waited until the very day before the expected arrival of the *Tamarind* at Southampton, and then, when every preparation was complete, when in a few hours Kenneth might be with them, a strange fit of melancholy fell on Joan.

"I shall never see him again!" she whispered to Aline. "I shall never hear him say he forgives me!"

"Nonsense!" said that little lady, resolutely. "Kenneth will be here to-morrow—he never disappoints us."

The door opened, and Mr. Ford came in. There was something in his face which struck Joan with terror.

"Something has happened!" she cried. "Oh! father, tell me what it is?"

"My dear child!"

He had meant not to tell her. He had desired to keep it from her, at least until the next day; but the agony on her face, her piteous entreaties, brought out the truth. The good ship *Tamarind* had sunk at sea, and every soul on board had gone down. The news had been brought by a small brig, which had encountered the ill-fated steamer in mid-sea. There was enough of the wreck remaining to leave no doubt of her identity; but not a creature had survived to tell the tale of her loss.

"He will never know I loved him," were the first words which came from Joan's set white lips.

"He knows it now," breathed Aline, through her sobs.

"He can't!" Then she turned to them with passionate self-reproach.

"Why don't you send me away! Why don't you turn me from your door! Don't you know it is all my fault—mine? But for my pride and wilfulness he would never have gone to Africa and been drowned in the cruel sea!"

They tried their best to soothe her. They smothered their own grief to comfort hers. They told her she must always stay with them—that she was Kenneth's last legacy to them; but they could avail little, until at last, worn out with emotion, she dropped asleep, a portrait of her husband clasped in her hand.

"Is there no hope!" pleaded Aline, when poor Joan's troubled eyes had closed.

Mr. Ford shook his head.

"None!"

"Kenneth might not have sailed in the *Tamarind*."

"Then he would have written to say so."

"His letter might have been in the mails carried by the *Tamarind* herself."

The old man's brow lightened.

"Then we shall hear to-morrow. On hearing the fate of the *Tamarind* he would telegraph at once."

Oh! how they waited through that day! how they listened, longingly, for the postman's knock! It came often enough, alas! with notes and telegrams of condolence from all parts, but the cable message which would have brought hope and joy to those troubled hearts was not among them.

There could be no doubt of Kenneth's fate. Everyone accepted it; the household were put into mourning.

Mr. Ford and Aline wore black for him they had held so dear, but Joan absolutely refused to assume the garb of a widow.

"I shall go to him," she said, wistfully. "It was in the Yuletide we met, it was in the Yuletide he was to have been given back to me. He cannot come, but I shall go to him."

She looked so unearthly in her fragile loveliness that they had no heart to cross the fancy.

They could not but see on how frail a thread the young life rested, could not but think it might be even as she said, and her spirit really soon set forth on its journey to meet her husband's, so they let her have her way.

She wore the soft half-mourning she had never quite left off; her beautiful hair, which had all been cut off in the fever, clustered in soft rings round her head, and she looked to them like some beautiful, weary child longing for its rest.

One strange fancy she had. When her wedding-day came round she insisted on being left alone. Mr. Ford and Aline would gladly have stayed with her, but she declared solitude was best, and they must not miss the evening service at the church Kenneth had helped to build.

"It is just a year to-night," she said, as she kissed her sister-in-law; "one little year, and the Yuletide is here again. Perhaps when you come back I shall be with Kenneth."

So they left her in the beautiful drawing-room which she had declared must be decked with evergreens as usual. She lay on a couch in the soft winter firelight, and the old servants, creeping up from time to time to look at her, declared one to the other that her face was already like the face of an angel.

And sleep came to her—sound sleep—not like the fitful, troubled slumbers she had had of late. She was dreaming of her happy childhood at FitzCarew, and so she never heard the sounds of an arrival—of tears and sobs, and explanations. She never knew what had happened until, when she opened her eyes, she saw someone standing at her side whom she had thought to see on earth no more.

"Kenneth!"

He bent over her, a world of tenderness in his dark eyes.

"Sweetheart!"

"They said you were dead!" she murmured. "Wasn't it true, or have you come back from spiritland just to hear me say I love you?"

Kenneth said nothing; his heart was too full for speech, only he held his wife's hand as though content had come for him at last.

"They said you would not come!" she whispered, "but I knew better. I knew you would come back to me on our wedding-day."

"And you have wanted me, Joan?"

"I think I have wanted you always," she said, faintly; "ever since—"

"Ever since what, my wife?"

"Ever since you saved my life."

Kenneth stooped down and took her in his arms. For the first time in all their married life he pressed his lips to hers.

"And you will be mine now, Joan," he said, fondly; "mine in deed and truth?"

"Yes; but I don't understand. Have you come back, or have I really gone?"

"Gone where, dear?"

"I was so ill," she said, slowly, "and I always said if you did not come soon I should have gone to you. Have I really gone?"

Kenneth shuddered. He looked at her in an agony of fear. True, she was pale and fragile, as he had never seen her before. There was a beauty not of earth on her lovely face.

"Joan!" he cried, hoarsely, "you must not leave me! I could not bear it! My darling, stay with me!"

"I should like to," she answered, "only I am tired—so very tired, and everything looks so far away."

He held her in his arms, pillowed against his heart, as though to fight for her possession inch by inch with death; and her head fell back on his shoulder, as though it had found its true resting-place at last.

So the others found them when they came home and heard the wondrous news.

Allan's supposition was true after all.

Kenneth had written by the *Tamarind* to say that he couldn't sail by her,

but should return to England by a vessel due one week later. Being out in mid-ocean at the time the news of the wreck of the *Tamarind* became known, he never knew the fate of that ship or the agony entailed upon his friends. It was only when he reached London that he learned the agony they must be suffering.

So, after all, Joan's prophecy came true. Her husband came back to her in the bright Yuletide, and the two, who had so long been "strangers," yet began a new life together of faith and love.

There are no secrets between them. He knows quite well Joan's folly in those dark autumn days, and how roughly the truth of her parentage was told to her, but even that does not hurt her now. She is contented to owe everything—name, position, wealth—to her husband, of whose life she knows quite well she is the crowning joy.

She never bore the name of Fairfax. Very soon after that happy reunion the old lord died, and Kenneth and his wife took up their places in the great world as Earl and Countess of Linross.

A stately, handsome pair, respected and esteemed by all who know them, their wedded life is noted by all as a model of perfect happiness; but not one of those who cluster round the young Countess, and compliment her on her wit and beauty, know the pride and folly that so nearly ruined her whole life, and was only saved when her husband was given back to her safe and well in the bright Yuletide.

[THE END.]

### CHRISTMAS HOSPITALITY.

THE latter years of good Queen Bess, when her health and spirits failed, was a sad time for poor old Father Christmas and all his merry train of minstrels, mummers, and frolicsome followers. Of course, the country took the tone from the monarch, and the old icied gentleman became:—

"..... a pinch-back, cut-throat churl,  
That keeps no open house, as he should do,  
Delighteth in no game or fellowship,  
Loves no good deeds and hatheth talk;  
But sitteth in a corner turning crabs,  
Or coughing o'er a warmed pot of ale."

So says the author of "Summer's Last Will and Testament"; and the writer of "Father Hubbard's Tales," the dramatist Middleton, echoes the strain, adding:—

"Do but imagine now what a sad Christmas we all kept in the country, without either carols, wassail-bowls, dancing of Sellenger's Round in moonshine about Maypoles, shoeing the mare, hoodman-blind, hot cockles, or any of our old Christmas gambols; no, not so much as choosing king and queen on Twelfth Night."

The too great resort of the English gentry to the metropolis, their neglect of rural hospitalities, and contempt of rural manners, appears to have particularly engaged the attention of our English Solomon, James I., and the contemplative Bishop Hall, in the course of the seventeenth century. Let us first hear what the king says, in his address to the Council of the Star Chamber:—

"One of the greatest causes of all Gentleman's desire that have no calling or errand to dwell in London, is apparently the pride of the women; for if they be wives, then their husbands—if they be maids, then their fathers, must bring them up to London, because the new fashion is to be had nowhere but in London: and here, if they be unmarried, they mar their marriages; and if they be married they lose their reputations, and rot their husbands' purses. It is the fashion of Italy—that all the Gentry dwell in the principal towns, and so the whole country is empty; even so now in England, all the country is gotten into London, so as with time England will be only London, and the whole country be left waste; for as we now do imitate the French in fashion of clothes, and lacques to follow every man, so have we got up the Italian fashion, in living miserably in our houses, and dwelling all in the city. But let us leave these idle foreign toys, and keep the old fashion of England; and therefore as every fish lives in his own place, some in the fresh, some in the salt, some in the mud, so let everyone live in his own place, some at court, some in the city, some in the country, specially at festival times, as Christmas and Easter, and the rest."

The flocking of the nobility to London at Christmas, was the occasion of a proclamation by James, which is thus reticled in a letter from Mr. Chamberlain to Sir Dudley Carleton, bearing date Dec. 21, 1622:—

"Diverse Lords and personages of quality have made means to be dispensed withal for going into the country this Christmas according to the proclama-

tion: but it will not be granted, so that they pack away on all sides for fear of the worst."

James's successor, Charles I., insisted by proclamation that:—

"Every nobleman or gentleman, bishop, rector, or curate, unless he be in the service of the Court or Council, shall in forty days depart from the cities of London and Westminster, and resort to their several counties, where they usually reside, and there keep their habitations and hospitality."

### THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS.

A WORLD without a Christmas! Who of us can imagine it, or in imagining can fail to realize what Christmas has done for the world! The exigencies of our modern life have robbed us of the full meaning of Sunday; one man's rest in it is purchased at the cost of another man's labour, and no universal peace prevails. High days and holidays the world over, with all feasts and festivals, belong to creeds or governments, to superstitions of the soil or the traditions of a tribe. But Christmas—Christmas belongs to no one nation alone, nor to one tongue, nor to one latitude or longitude, nor to one colour or creed. Neither is it a movable feast, though it comes with the frost of winter, as with us; and with the perfume of drooping blossoms, as in the Southern Hemisphere. Nor yet is it a day one man celebrates with a dance and another with a feast, thinking he has fulfilled all of its spirit. Though feasts belong to it, and good cheer, and all the sweet delights of gifts given and gifts received; though the beauteous tree comes in and the blazing log; though the deer of St. Nicholas prances over the snow, and young hearts are merry and old hearts are glad—though all these things belong to this day, yet even they are but the outcome, the fulfilment of that deeper note of good will to men sung first by the angels of Bethlehem. For it is the spirit of good will to others that all men feel on Christmas that makes the day distinct, pre-eminent, distinguishing it from all other days, and giving to it all the power it has.

We have done much for Christmas. We have given it joyous ceremonials, growing in beauty and sentiment all these centuries through. We have done this for Christmas; but Christmas has done more for us. It has given to the world this one day, when all about its hemispheres, like a finely-wrought web, one thought is woven in the minds of men, inspiring the best and sweetest actions of the year. There is no man but feels its influence, or, failing, has more sorrow for himself that his joy is dead, than for those he has failed to make happy. The poorest, the most squalid, the keenest sufferer, the happiest, most prosperous of men—all these obey one common impulse; they give their best, poor as some of their offerings may be, for the joy of others. It is this, then, that Christmas has done for the world, stirring men to common action. And with such a cordon of thought about the world, growing stronger and wider each one of these eighteen hundred and ninety-eight years, who can doubt that in its spirit may be found the true secret of those great, philanthropic measures which, beyond all other events, mark the enlightened legislation of our day?









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# THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

PART 453. VOL. LXXI.—JANUARY, 1899.

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PRICE SIXPENCE.

LONDON:

PUBLISHED AT THE OFFICE, 26, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

AND OF ALL BOOKSELLERS.

